A "RIVER OF EARTH" by FRED BROWN

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

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DIGGING APPALACHIA

THE TRANSPLANTING

By DENISE HEINZE

WHY IS IT CALLED THE "RHINO PIT"?

By STEVEN WALLACE

RECONSTRUCTING THE ANCIENT ECOLOGY OF THE GRAY FOSSIL SITE

By LARISA R. G. DeSANTIS

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Now & Then: The Appalachian Magazine Digging Appalachia Spring/Summer 2007 Vol. 23 No. 1

4.16.07

Three flags flew at half mast on the Virginia Tech campus: a school flag, a Virginia flag, and an American flag. A cold and cruel wind coming down out of the Blue Ridge Mountains shredded the edges of those flags. But they continued to fly, fully unfurled.

As I watched the unimaginable story of mass killing unfold in the unlikeliest of places, on the campus of a sister institution of higher education in Appalachia, I kept coming back in my mind to the image of those flags, damaged, torn, but still in the air.

Virginia Tech is torn. It is ripped apart by pain. Stained by the blood of its very own students and faculty. But it will fly again. Just as the cheers rose up from every corner of the tear-soaked basketball arena during the service of remembrance, Virginia Tech will fly again. Out of the depths of a disaster no emergency preparedness plan could ever predict, out of sorrow immeasurable, Virginia Tech will fly again.

As the poet Nikki Giovanni said, "We will continue to invent the future, through our blood and tears, through all this sadness. We are the Hokies."

A single votive candle burned before a vase of yellow flowers on the Virginia Tech campus. Above it, the photograph of engineering professor Liviu Librescu, 76 years old. A man who survived The Holocaust and escaped Communist oppression in Romania. A man who died on Holocaust Remembrance Day, in a university classroom, trying to protect his students from slaughter.

Students with 4.0 averages, one on his way to a Ph.D. in psychology. Dancers, future veterinarians. A songwriter. An internationally known expert on muscle and reflex response. Students learning German and French, to gain a greater understanding and a way in the world. All lost in an instant.

America's classrooms are places of quiet contemplation, friendly debate, and shared aspirations. They represent for us the height of civility, respect, and human ambition, not darkness and death.

To the families and friends of the students and teachers who died in Blacksburg, to President Charles Steger and the faculty and staff at Virginia Tech, to all those who have been touched in any way by this horrific tragedy, we extend our deep and enduring sympathy.

Out of these depths, Virginia Tech will fly again.

Paul E. Stanton, Jr.
President of East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee

On the cover: *Steven Wallace at the Gray Fossil Site. Photo courtesy Jim Sledge, ETSU Photo Lab.*

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DIGGING IS AN ACT OF FAITH

By ROBERTA HERRIN
CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES
DIRECTOR

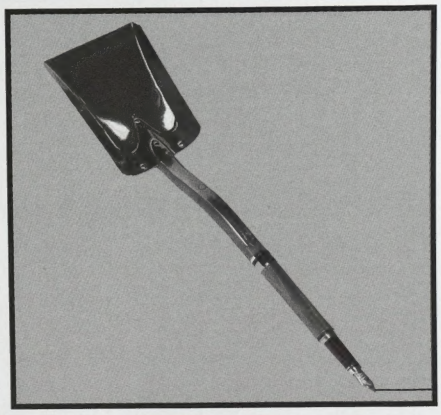


Illustration by Sara Peters.

These days, every organization, business, or institution crafts a mission statement, and far too many of us have spent weeks, months, or even years quibbling over words and paring down sentences, trying to fashion one tight word-package that communicates what we do. Don't get me wrong—mission statements are important. But I often think that our mission in Appalachian studies is so simple as to negate this tedious process. "To dig" might be sufficient: to delve so deeply into the region as to know its geology, prehistory, history, people, art, literature, music.

When I first heard George Ella Lyon read her poem "Archaeology," it struck me as a package of words that mirrors my search to "know" Appalachia—and my place in it. The poem opens with,

I am digging
With a soft brush a pen
at the site of my founding city
Mothers
Fathers

A pen is as reliable a tool for digging as a spade or trowel. People who want to know a thing often write their way to the knowing. Words can burrow into the region, looking for certainties and secrets.

Like any good mission statement, Lyon's poem calls me back to it, again and again. I revisit it, the way one returns to an ancient spring to drink cool water from a cupped laurel leaf, or walks a worn path through familiar woods looking for newness—the first trillium of the season or the mole's soft, dirt-mound breaking up the old, hardened path. "Archaeology" has become a familiar and comfortable guide, pointing me in the direction of what matters.

And the mountain speaks through its clay flute
and feet dance up and down its back
brushing off the light of this page
to sift through dark rooms
dust of a house I never entered
by a window where I make my bread.

Digging is an act of faith that we will find "something." Then we have to accept what we find under the surface and beyond the cliché, and what turns up may challenge our most fixed certainties. Brother Sim Mobberly comments in James Still's *River of Earth* that he used to think "a mountain was the standingist object in the sight of God." Like Sim, we have had to accept the impermanence of mountains, because mountaintops can be blown away. And remnants of long-extinct species can be unearthed, brought to life, as it were, in a new time, reminding us that all things exist in all time.

Can there be a nobler mission than to dig into the region in search of understanding, hoping to find the living interconnectedness of all things in all time: "dust of a house I never entered / by a window where I make my bread"? ❖

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

By FRED SAUCEMAN

The theme for this issue, "Digging Appalachia," was chosen to recognize the opening of a museum and visitor center at what has come to be called the Gray Fossil Site in Northeast Tennessee. In these pages, Harry Moore, geologist for the Tennessee Department of Transportation, recounts, firsthand, the amazing story of the site's discovery—how TDOT road crews halted construction on Highway 75 when they began to notice soft, black clay under their graders and dozers. The keen perception of those workers led to the discovery and preservation of one of the country's most prolific fossil sites, a seven-million-year-old lake bed that has produced more tapir fossils than anywhere in the world. East Tennessee State University paleontologist Steven Wallace, knee-deep in the "Rhino Pit," recounts the unearthing of an ancient rhinoceros family. From her lab at the University of Florida, Larisa DeSantis joins in with a description of her work in reconstructing those animals' diets through analysis of their tooth enamel.

We reminisce, with two Cherokee ladies, about the digging of ramps in Western North Carolina and go on a ginseng ramble with Joe Willis, age ninety-three.

We dust off gravestones in forgotten family cemeteries. We learn pick-and-shovel grave-digging in the Spivey Mountain community of Unicoi County, Tennessee. We look over Bill Best's sweaty shoulder as he makes the ground ready for another crop of greasy cut-short beans in Kentucky.

An entry celebrates a university mining engineering program, while another laments the devastation of mountaintop removal.

A Michigander tells how the planting of a single forsythia taught her volumes about the character of her mountain neighbors.

We stretched "digging" to embrace 1960s jargon, too, profiling people who "dig" the region—Rebecca Anderson promoting mountain crafts, Anne Pope touting Appalachia in the halls of the nation's capitol, and Mark Musick campaigning for mathematics and science education in the public schools. Abe Whaley traces the nation's cycles of interest in Appalachia, from President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty to AmeriCorps.

And I talk boiled peanuts with a university president—my university president, Dr. Paul E. Stanton, Jr., who celebrated ten years at the helm of East Tennessee State this year. For Dr. Stanton, boiled peanuts mean not only a salt-of-the-sea flavor and memories of North Georgia soil, but, more importantly, the daylong cooking of the groundnut is a way to strengthen the bonds of an already close family.

It is to Dr. Stanton that we dedicate this issue of *Now & Then*. ❖

RECKONING

By JEFF BIGGERS

" . . . Appalachia remains on the front lines of the most drastic strip-mining and mountaintop-removal policies in American history. Far from being an employment factor, mountaintop removal is simply the quickest and cheapest way for multinational companies to procure the coal from Appalachia. Unleashed in the last decade, operating on poorly enforced, misconstrued, or relaxed environmental laws, massive machines the size of buildings are literally roaring into the backwoods and knocking the mountains into the valleys and natural drainage routes. Over the last decade, an estimated one million acres of hardwood forests have been leveled in the region; more than 720 miles of streams have been destroyed; more than 1,000 miles of waterways are being wiped out.

The result has been devastating. Filling in natural drainage gullies and wreaking erosive havoc in its deforesting wake, mountaintop removal has completely altered the landscape in some of the most breathtaking parts of the Mountain South and the United States. Entire communities have been lost. Even monumental Blair Mountain in West Virginia, the sacred ground of organized labor in its pivotal insurrection against coal companies in 1921, has been placed on the chopping block. In the process, many mountain homes, hamlets, and towns are now at risk of being flooded out or are following the death pattern of the Buffalo Creek disaster in the 1970s, when over one hundred lives were lost when a coal dam broke in West Virginia.

A mountain the size of Rhode Island is being dismantled." ❖

Jeff Biggers, from *The United States of Appalachia: How Southern Mountaineers Brought Independence, Culture, and Enlightenment to America*, ©2006, Shoemaker & Hoard.

Photo (detail) courtesy Mike Smith.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF SORROW:
Mountaintop Removal in Appalachia

By MEGAN JEWELL KERNS

"Hope is a thing with feathers/ That perches in the soul/ And sings the tune—without the words/ And never stops at all"

Emily Dickinson, *"Hope"*

The geography of the land evokes strong emotions from the people who traverse it. When my family moved to East Tennessee for a brief three years during my childhood, I fell in love with the landscape. The dark, purple mountains that loomed on the horizon comforted me. The brilliant springtime blooms of the dogwood and redbud trees convinced me we had stumbled into Eden.

As a teenager, I left my home in Ohio to attend East Tennessee State University. I was drawn back because I felt a deep sense of kinship with the area. My mother's family is from East Tennessee. The astounding natural beauty of the region entranced me.

Recently, though, I began to understand that Appalachia is under siege and that the war zone crisscrosses my own backyard. I had heard the terms *strip mining* and *mountaintop removal* before, but I only had a vague notion of their ugly reality. The words themselves are surgical in nature, suggesting a clean, orderly procedure, as if an ancient, perfectly functioning ecosystem could be neatly excised.

A dragline in action.
Photo (detail) courtesy Mike Smith.

In my Advanced Composition course in the fall of 2006, I read an article by Erik Reece from *Harper's* magazine entitled "Death of a Mountain: Radical Strip Mining and the Leveling of Appalachia." (This article was expanded into a book, *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness—Radical Strip Mining and the Devastation of Appalachia.*) As I read Reece's account of Lost Mountain's destruction, the horror became concrete for me—I was appalled by the blatant disregard that the coal companies seemed to have for both the land and the people who inhabit it.

Dirty Deeds, and They're Done Dirt Cheap

Strip mining, also called mountaintop removal, is not the traditional coal mining of yesteryear, where hundreds of men would tunnel through a mountain. Mountaintop removal was implemented in the 1970s as the most economically efficient way to procure coal. It is less labor-intensive. A small crew of men operating gargantuan machinery can dissect a mountain with ease, and in rapid time.

First the vegetation is razed and sometimes burned or pushed illegally into the valley, in the haste to get to the coal. Then heavy explosives are used to blast away hundreds of feet of elevation, in order to access the coal seams deep in the heart of the mountain.

Monstrous pieces of machinery, called draglines, are then used to dig the coal out. Any waste or debris (termed "spoil" or "overburden") is pushed into the valley below, which poisons or completely destroys the nearby streams with the arsenic, copper, cadmium, and other toxic metals that heretofore had been safely ensconced in the geographical timeline of the mountain itself, like rings in a tree. The coal is then washed, creating open coal slurry ponds.

Finally, the coal company is required to restore vegetation as part of "reclamation." Unfortunately, this often means the site is merely transformed into a grassy savannah, putting families below at risk for severe flooding, poisoning their wells, and tainting the soil. According to essayist David W. Orr, mountaintop reclamation is the equivalent of "putting lipstick on a corpse."

A Clear and Present Danger

The inherent danger involved in corralling millions of gallons of toxic waste was exemplified over thirty years ago. In Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, several coal slurry dams collapsed during a flood in 1972, drowning 125 people in the dark waters and leaving 4,000 homeless in its wake.

On October 11, 2000, in Inez, Kentucky, one of Massey Energy's impoundment dams collapsed. The slurry barreled through an underground mine and disgorged itself upon the landscape. More than 300 million gallons of viscous, black coal slurry poured into the Big Sandy River and its tributaries. The river of sludge killed millions of fish and decimated one hundred miles of streams.

Like a toxic version of *The Blob*, the slurry engulfed homes, vehicles, children's swing sets, doghouses, and anything else in its path. The spill contaminated the water of 27,623 people, destroyed bridges, and eventually infiltrated the Ohio River near Cincinnati.

The Inez disaster was thirty times larger than the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and yet it took the *New York Times* months to get around to reporting it. Miraculously, no one died, but the damage was extensive, possibly irrevocable. The Environmental Protection Agency calls it "the worst environmental disaster in the history of the southeastern United States."

Incredibly, the slurry that spilled over the citizens of Inez constituted only fifteen percent of the total waste held in that particular impoundment pond.

Jack Spadaro was one of the engineers for the National Mine Health and Safety Academy that investigated the Inez spill. Spadaro found damning evidence that Massey Energy officials had known about a previous spill from the same impoundment in 1994, and that they had fudged the details of the infrastructure of said slurry pond in order to continue with "business as usual." When Spadaro was ordered to close the investigation by federal authorities—who, it happened, had received generous campaign contributions from the coal industry—the investigator refused, which eventually led to his dismissal.

An Ecological Education

Knowledge truly is power. It is the means and the mechanism for change. A particularly useful Internet tool is Google Earth, a search engine that employs satellite imagery. Often the devastation wrought by mountaintop removal is hidden from view, away from major interstates and highways. However, now all one has to do is type into Google Earth a phrase such as, say, "Perry County, Kentucky," and the impact is undeniable: There, half the mountains have been recontoured. In their place, unnatural mesas contrast sharply with the rolling topography of Appalachia.

Currently more than half our electricity in the Tennessee Valley comes from coal. Almost seventy percent of coal is harvested using strip-mining practices.

I am troubled by the thought that mountaintop removal is a machine that cannot be stopped—after all, it is fueled by the demands of a population that currently places a higher priority on short-term energy solutions, rather than focusing on conservation and moderation with long-term goals in mind. To counter this monstrous equation, all I have is the ferocity of hope, armed with the tenacity of words. The spring blossoms that grace the dogwood and the redbud trees, I have noticed, are especially lovely this year. ❖

Megan Jewell Kerns is a senior English major at East Tennessee State University, with a minor in environmental studies. She lives in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

An aerial view of a mountaintop being taken down. Photo (detail) courtesy Mike Smith.

COAL MINING: A FAMILY BUSINESS IN WEST VIRGINIA

By SHAINNA STICKLEN

You could say that Morgan Sears, a senior in West Virginia University's mining engineering program, was born into his field. His father, Casey, quit school when he was fifteen to work for his dad in the coal mines. When Casey Sears was in his thirties, he decided to go back to school and studied mining engineering at the West Virginia University Institute of Technology in Montgomery.

"I admire that he was able to make it through college at that point in his life," said Morgan. "The fact that he was able to succeed, especially in a difficult major like engineering, showed me that anyone can if they're willing to work hard enough."

When Morgan was growing up, he had no intentions of following in his father's footsteps.

"I always told him that I would never work in a coal mine." Morgan recalled.

His father was glad, knowing that mining can be a hard way to make a living. However, the job opportunities in the field and the scholarships that WVU offers students in mining engineering helped change both of their minds. Still, the father had some advice for his son.

"Even though I am in mining, he told me not to go into production," said Morgan. "It pays a higher salary, but you are required to work long hours and the work is much harder."

Besides coming from a coal mining family, Morgan was surrounded by mining as he was growing up. He was born and raised in Summersville, in central West Virginia. The town has a population of 3,200

Morgan Sears. Photo courtesy Shainna Sticklen.

and is home not only to coal mining but also to the largest lake in West Virginia. Summersville Lake provides 2,800 acres of water and 60 miles of shoreline and is a hot spot for tourists, offering a variety of recreational adventures, such as boating, swimming, fishing, scuba diving, hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and, possibly most famously, whitewater rafting.

Morgan spends as much of his spare time as possible outdoors, crunching through dry leaves to hunt for deer in the fall, trudging through the snow in winter to hunt for bears, casting a line into the lake to fish in the springtime, and speeding over forested mountains on his four-wheeler in the summer.

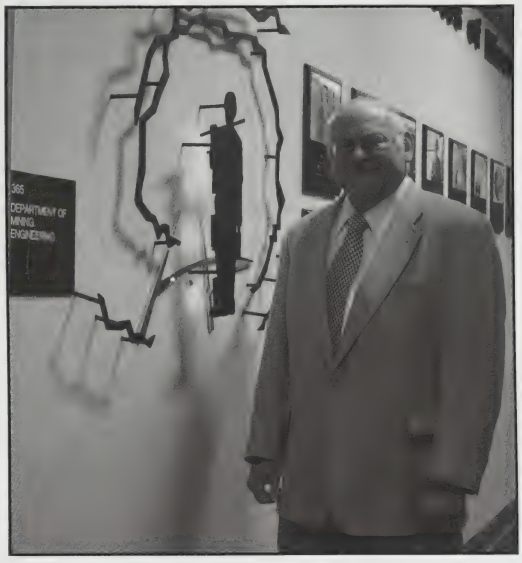
But he also knows what it's like to work hard underground. During the summer of 2006, he worked for Brooks Run Mining in Webster and Braxton counties. Every day, he rose at 5:30 a.m.—an hour when many college students might have been just pouring themselves into bed during their summer breaks—to be at the mine by 6:30. He was underground by 7:00 a.m. and remained until 4:00 p.m., even eating lunch in the mines.

"One of the most important things to be concerned with in a mine is keeping rocks off of your head," he says. "But I was never really scared. I figured if the guy next to me had done it for so many years, I could do it, too."

According to the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training, coal is found in fifty-three of fifty-five counties, and the state accounts for fifteen percent of the country's coal production.

West Virginia University, the state's flagship university, has been educating engineers and mine managers and conducting mining research for over 130 years.

Christopher Bise, the chairman of WVU's Department of Mining Engineering, is a newcomer to the state and to WVU, having joined the faculty in the fall of 2006. Bise came from Pennsylvania State University, where he served on the faculty for thirty years.



He leads a department at WVU that is small but growing, with a current enrollment of seventy undergraduate students and twenty graduate students. Bise is hopeful that, given the current boom in the coal industry, the department's recent growth will continue.

"In the near future, I'd like to see at least one hundred undergraduates, with us graduating about eighteen to twenty students each year," Bise said.

Bise also has an interest in expanding department research during his term. Some major research interests of the department include mine health and safety, mining methods and equipment, environmental protections, and groundwater effects.

"We are surrounded by the richest coal field in the United States in a state that is synonymous with coal," Bise said. "We receive a great deal of support from the state and the people who live here."

One form of support that the department receives from alumni, friends, and coal companies is financial aid for students. Scholarships are abundant for those who choose to study mining engineering. Each student is guaranteed at least $2,000 a year for four years.

"Not many programs at WVU can say that every student gets a scholarship," Bise said. "We are pleased that we are able to offer our students that kind of assistance in advancing their education.

"Coal companies are aggressive about recruiting our students. The demand for workers far exceeds the supply. The long-term demand is critical. The career opportunities are outstanding. The industry needs to replace talented people with talented people. This is a great time for students to be considering careers in mining engineering."

Bise himself worked in a mine before deciding to return to school, and he fondly remembers the time he spent with other miners.

"The bonds that are created in mining are unique," Bise said. "My

Christopher Bise, Chairman of WVU's Department of Mining Engineering. Photo courtesy Shainna Sticklen.

first mining superintendent took me under his wing. He's eighty-one years old now, but we still keep in contact and maintain that relationship. The people who work in mining are the type who would do anything for you, people who really look out for each other."

Morgan agrees.

"When I was in the mines, every miner treated me as an equal," he said. "I think that by being a miner, I was able to gain a different perspective on the industry, which will help me as an engineer. For example, if I want to design something for use in a coal mine, how much work is it going to take to use it? Is it worth it? I can consider how much work it takes to do the job and how much time it takes to do the job. In certain times and conditions, it's not worth it to design something new."

Morgan Sears has enjoyed his time in Morgantown and at WVU, so much so that he is considering staying for graduate school in mining engineering. He is currently serving as the president of the WVU student chapter of the Society for Mining, Metallurgy, and Exploration.

Besides educating mining engineers of the future, WVU also has been providing training to rank-and-file coal miners since 1913 through its Department of Mining Extension. In this program, future rank-and-file coal miners complete an eight-week course and receive an apprentice card after passing a certification test at the end of the course. They learn about working in a mine and the kind of equipment that is used before they even enter the mine.

Safety has always been an important focus of the Mining Extension program, and, in the wake of increased accidents, that focus has only strengthened. In fact, the director of the department, Jim Dean, left his WVU post temporarily at the request of West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin to serve for several months as acting director of the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health Safety and Training, the state agency responsible for enforcing state laws relating to mine safety and health.

The Department of Mining Extension works closely with the state's coal industry to provide training programs for coal miners. With the recent growth in the coal market and the retirement of baby boomers, the demand for well-trained miners is soaring.

CONSOL Energy recently donated a mine training facility outside Morgantown to WVU, and that facility now serves as the northern headquarters for the training program. Meanwhile, Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College is coordinating the program in the southern part of the state. The West Virginia Coal Association has also been an important part of the program's growth and success.

Set to enter a profession he said he never would, Morgan Sears is now satisfied with the choices and decisions he has made, and he seems completely comfortable following in his father's footsteps in the coal mining industry.

"Getting this degree has been an investment in my future," he said. "I think that it will allow me to start out in a higher-level position with a company than someone who does not have a degree in mining engineering. I might be able to work my way up into a management position in a year instead of four or five years."

Chris Bise is confident that Morgan will do well in the industry.

"Morgan is a very modest person," Bise said. "But people in mining engineering respect that, and it will get him a lot of consideration. He is a hard worker and very dedicated. His outstanding grades reflect that. And he is a team player, which is vital in mining. Hardworking and conscientious people like Morgan can succeed in mining engineering, and there is no doubt that the industry needs more of them." ❖

Shainna Sticklen is originally from Charleston, West Virginia. She works for the WVU College of Engineering and Mineral Resources as a public relations graduate assistant. She has a B.A. in English from WVU where she is a graduate student in the professional writing and editing program. She resides in Morgantown.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATIONS:

Rock Shelters and Caves on the Upper Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee

By JAY D. FRANKLIN

The Upper Cumberland Plateau is part of a larger region known in early historic times as the "Wilderness." John Campbell, writing in 1921, called it "that dark and mysterious forest." Early historic travelers through the region remarked that the sun seemed to be blocked out for days at a time. Perhaps characterizations such as these led noted ethnologist John Swanton to comment that highland regions were most likely inhabited more out of necessity than preference.

Highland regions of Southern Appalachia have received short shrift in scholarly research, including archaeology, largely because of these ideas. Campbell also remarked that the Southern Highlands were "a land about which, perhaps, more things are known that are not true than of any part of our country." In the same sentence, however, he called the Southern Highlands a land of promise.

I have been conducting systematic archaeological research on the Upper Cumberland Plateau for eleven years, and I can say two things for certain. First, conceptions about the prehistory of the region are misinformed and untested, and, second, it is certainly a land of archaeological promise, for underneath the towering sandstone bluff lines and in the myriad hardwood coves and box canyons of the plateau are thousands of rock shelters and hundreds of caves. These geologic features are not only part of the natural landscape but also part of the cultural landscape. While early Euro-American settlers did not encounter living Native American towns and villages on the Upper Cumberland Plateau, prehistoric Native Americans used and lived in these rock shelters and caves for 12,000 years or more.

Many people view caves as mysterious and dangerous locations on the landscape, and certainly this can be true. I will admit

An enormous rock house where artifacts range from 10,000 to 1,000 years old. Photo courtesy Jay Franklin.

that part of my initial attraction to cave archaeology stems from these ideas. However, I have discovered that most of the time cave archaeology is neither mysterious nor particularly dangerous. In fact, in most respects, it is no different than doing archaeology in any setting. Archaeologists everywhere are concerned with answering the same basic questions: When were prehistoric peoples here and what were they doing?

North American archaeology has tended to focus on broad, lowland areas around major river floodplains. This is particularly true in the Southeast where many large-scale archaeological projects were undertaken during the Depression of the 1930s under the aegis of New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Works Progress Administration, and the Tennessee Valley Authority. The primary purpose of these massive projects was to put people to work, not necessarily to solve prehistoric problems. In fact, projects were often simply undertaken in Southern counties where unemployment rates were the highest. Depression-era archaeology taught us much about the prehistory of the Southeast. However, it also led to an understandable research bias that in many ways still characterizes Southeastern archaeology today: a focus on lowland regions.

Tennessee boasts more recorded caves than any other state in the union, over 9,000. Most of these occur in the highlands of East and Middle Tennessee—the Cumberland Plateau and the Ridge and Valley physiographic regions. Caves are part and parcel geologic features in the uplands of Southern Appalachia. Native Americans who lived in these areas for more than 12,000 years were keenly aware of that fact. Archaeological studies of these regions that do not include caves and rock shelters are incomplete.

So, while I confess to becoming interested in cave and rock shelter archaeology in part because of perceptions of mystery and difficulty, the fact that Native Americans in upland regions made use of their entire landscape, including caves, for a variety of purposes has kept me exploring these dark environments. Caves were used for the extraction of resources such as flint for stone tools, various minerals, shelter, habitation, and sometimes for the production of art. In Southern Appalachia, caves were an integral part of the natural and cultural landscape.

Where caves often differ from the outside world is in preservation. In caves, the archaeological record is often not subject to the destructive forces of plowing, weathering, and erosion that characterize many open-air sites. In caves the modern surface is often the ancient surface. In some cases, it is possible to make out human footprints that have remained for thousands of years. Wonderful works of art can often be seen in the dark zones on the walls and ceilings of caves. The remarkable preservation in cave environments sometimes permits us a view into prehistory that no longer remains in the outside world.

The prehistoric inhabitants of the Upper Cumberland Plateau of Tennessee possessed their own unique cultural history, one that cannot be interpreted in light of the prehistory of other regions. This cultural history must tell its own story. It is this challenge that keeps me strapping on a helmet and headlamp and venturing into places that most people today will never see but that someone before me may have inhabited thousands of years ago. Toward that end I continue my archaeological investigations of this rugged, beautiful region. ❖

Jay D. Franklin is assistant professor of archaeology at East Tennessee State University.

A "RIVER OF EARTH": How it Helped Shape the People of Appalachia

By FRED BROWN

To get some notion of why early settlers in East Tennessee remained after arriving from Europe, you have to understand the general contours of this varied land.

Land shapes had everything to do with early population growth, because in East Tennessee, the mountains and valleys were not only reminiscent of home across the oceans, but also allowed for independence, safety, the ability to grow food, and, above all, to be left alone.

Many of Tennessee's first settlers, arriving before the state was separate from North Carolina, found mountains and meadows to their liking. Naturally independent, the Scots-Irish, Welsh, German, and French arrived in large numbers in the 1700s, looking for freedom and new land. They found it in East Tennessee, which offered its hills for those eager to disappear into the deep forests, and the valleys for those who wanted farmland and places to live.

Imagine a stack of "rugs" five deep. Now push one end of this stack toward the other end so that the mass of rugs moves and eventually hits a wall. The rugs will respond to the resistance of the wall by crumpling into a series of folds that may roll over onto one another. This creates a series of elongated, parallel folds.

The valleys and ridges of East Tennessee have been pushed and folded, just like those rugs, creating the Valley and Ridge Province.

Rock sediments deposited in the seas between Africa and North America millions upon millions of years ago are now found in East Tennessee as well as in Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and northern parts of Alabama and Georgia.

Erosion of these "crumpled and folded" sediments has been uneven due to composition of the various rock formations. Sandstone and limestone most often form the ridges while the shale strata usually form the valleys. Because of the shale's weaker ability to withstand the erosion processes, it is easily eroded, forming great valleys.

Interstates 40 and 81 in East Tennessee follow these long valleys and occasionally cross one of the ridges.

In the Valley and Ridge, so called because of the alternating valley and ridge topography, rocks are mostly Cambrian (about 570

Map courtesy Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University.

million to 500 million years old) and Ordovician (500 million to 425 million years old). They consist mainly of limestone and shale.

The British, happy in most cases to see the hearty bunch of pioneers leave occupied territories, called them "the yelling devils." They ranged freely with the same fierceness and independence they had employed in fighting the British, finally settling along the hills and valleys surrounding the Watauga River, where they formed the first independent government ever established on the American continent.

The Wataugans named one of the first counties of East Tennessee for Landon Carter, architect of America's first experiment in self-determination. In 1772, Carter built a home in Elizabethton, most likely the first home built in what is now the state of Tennessee.

The beautiful river valley was a brief settling place for Abraham Lincoln's father, and here Daniel Boone killed his first bear. The region's hills and valleys have been sculpted by the languid wanderings of the Watauga River, which shaped the fertile bottomland into a quilt of fruitful fields. Smart settlers flocked to the valleys where the bottomlands would grow almost anything.

Siam Valley, whose outlines follow the graceful meandering of the river, leads to one of the most enchanting places in the area, the Horseshoe Bend of the Watauga River.

The earliest settlers here were known as the People of the Horseshoe. They were among the very first inhabitants to in-migrate to this area, carrying their belongings on their backs. Fearless but cautious, courageous but not foolhardy, the People of the Horseshoe entered just ahead of the first great wave of civilization and settled on land surrounded by the curve of the river's huge horseshoe bend.

They were intrepid, using their surroundings not only for food and shelter but also to fight off Indian attacks. They learned rapidly the ways of the backwoodsman and survived because they could adapt.

A single-wagon road evolved from an Indian trail that had been heavily traveled to harvest game. That single road led to the island of Horseshoe Bend, where a community became established. Its people, predominantly Scots-Irish, isolated themselves from the mainstream of development, continuing the clan rule of their former homes.

The Watauga Valley is a geologist's paradise. Here the varied rock formations not only determined the shape of the land itself but also served as grand architects for the region, deciding just where the first settlers could find sustenance and shelter.

Rock layers appear upturned in most places, with dip angles varying up to ninety degrees from horizontal. Most of the rock in East Tennessee has a dip angle of from twenty to forty-five degrees. In some places in the valley, however, the rocks are vertical and horizontal. For the early pioneer, these geologic variations and features acted as both barriers and providers of game, shelter, water, and wood.

Remnants of life even older than the mountains themselves are found in occasional outcroppings where fossils of extinct organisms can be found—worm burrows, brachiopods, and graptolites. Like X-rays of bones and innards, these organisms are the final shadows of animals that once lived in the ocean environment and are now frozen in time. They can still be seen in shale, limestone, and sandstone rock of the region, but it takes a great deal of searching.

One species of animal, *scolithus* (thought to be an actual worm burrow), is common to the sandstone strata of the Cambrian age Chilhowee Group. This animal would have been found in a Cambrian shallow water ocean bottom about 550 million years ago. At one time, the non-segmented worms may have been up to eight inches long.

Calcareous shale material, known to geologists as the Sevier Formation (Ordovician Period, approximately 450-470 million years old), will erode to a thin, yellowish-gray soil just thick enough to support a root mat.

In the yellow shale partings are the remains of past life forms forgotten by Mother Earth for many millions of years. A group of animals found in the shale partings of the Sevier Formation is referred to as graptolites. These animals were thought to have been "floaters" in the ancient ocean waters and possible forerunners of the vertebrate animals.

The rolling hills along Interstate 81 are clad in Eastern Red Cedar. They speak to us in a geologic tongue that tells the histories of thousands of millennia written in a strange, poetic beauty.

All along I-81 the Department of Transportation has planted cedar trees. They are profuse and have perfect Christmas tree form. They, too, reflect regional geology.

The growth of cedar trees means the soil is usually thin, no more than a couple of inches, and the bedrock is usually a shale or shaly limestone.

Many years ago, wild cranberries grew in the upper part of East Tennessee, and remnants of a cranberry bog still exist in Shady Valley. These boreal cranberry bogs, sitting 2,800 feet above sea level in a bowl surrounded by the Holston, Iron, and Cross mountains, were once the center of a commercial cranberry industry in the United States, but now this once great bog of 10,000 acres has shrunk to less than one-third of an acre. Jenkins Bog is under the protective custody of East Tennessee State University, since it is the sole vestige of Shady Valley's once superb cranberry past.

When the glaciers ground their way across the planet, covering about twenty percent of the surface, East Tennessee was spared the glaciers but not the fallout, scientists say. Although there is no evidence that Ice Age glaciers reached East Tennessee, the extreme temperatures did. With each major freeze and thaw, sea levels are thought to have changed hundreds of feet. As ice melted and sea levels rose, lower valleys were drowned, increasing soil deposits upstream. This created a tundra-like environment of great spans of sphagnum, which makes

a watery, acidic nest just right for producing cranberries.

The cranberry grows only in treeless areas, mainly where sphagnum moss and lots of water are located. The short, delicate cranberry vine with its frond-like tendrils grows in a thicket of sphagnum moss. Since the berries do not survive if the overhead canopy shuts off sunlight, they thrive best in glades under very wet conditions.

The cranberries left in Shady Valley are not harvested now because they are the descendants of the original cranberries that arrived there in the Ice Age. When the glaciers galloped south, they pushed the cranberry south. And when the icy roller-coasters retreated north once again, they took some cranberries with them on the return migration.

East Tennessee and Western North Carolina had quite suitable climates for cranberries. They flourished there, and when the glaciers packed it up for the ride back north, some of the cranberries headed north again along with the cooler, wetter climate. As the ice retreated from eastern shores, cranberry seeds began to migrate via birds and wind. Finding new bogs in the East and South, they took hold and multiplied. Early valley settlers were able to prosper because they had berries and fertile land set in the clouds.

Shady Valley's tilt is the result of erosion of a downward fold in the bedrock, known as the Stoney Creek Syncline. A syncline is easy to envision. Get a piece of cardboard and bear down on the top so that the piece bows either upward or downward. The downward bow is called a syncline and the upward bow is an anticline.

The Stoney Creek syncline has formed the rocks in an elongated bowl shape. In their structure, the youngest rocks are found in the center and the older rocks lie farther out. The elongation of the "bowl" parallels the structure of Stoney Creek Valley and the crests of the Iron and Holston mountains.

East Tennessee and Western North Carolina Railroad through Doe River Gorge. Photo courtesy Archives of Appalachia, Burr Harrison Collection, East Tennessee State University.

The Cross Mountain Fault cuts across both Iron and Holston mountains, near where they seem to converge at the head of Stoney Creek Valley, displacing somewhat the rocks in Shady Valley from those in Stoney Creek. The rocks in the central part of Shady Valley are layers of dolostone, which dissolve in the presence of acidic groundwater; therefore, the rocks in the central area of the valley have eroded more quickly than those surrounding the valley, causing the bowl-shaped topography.

Down from Shady Valley is Elizabethton, one of East Tennessee's earliest settlements. Here in this natural gathering place, some of the state's most important early history took place. Soldiers mustered at Sycamore Shoals on their way to the Battle of Kings Mountain during the Revolutionary War.

A shoal is a place in a stream where the channel is usually wide and shallow. A number of things can create a shoal, but usually it is a result of change in the substrate material or the topography that causes the stream flow to slow down. As a result, the water will "drop" sediment in the stream, anything from salt and sand to cobbles and boulders. The sediment builds up and creates a natural crossing place in the stream.

When settlers crossed over the mountains, this shoal provided one of the first places where they could easily ford the river. A settlement developed that eventually grew into Elizabethton.

From the region's music to its history, men and women in East Tennessee have been molded by the mountains.

Not far away are Valley Forge and the Doe River Gorge. Valley Forge got its name from the old iron forge built in the community just where the Doe River emerges from the gorge. Iron ores were extracted from the buck fat clays and residuum of the Shady Formation, a dolostone rock. This allowed settlers to make tools and weapons.

The gorge exists where the Doe River cuts across upturned and resistant strata of the Chilhowee Group of rock formations. The cut through this rock represents many millions of years of unrelenting river flow.

The gorge also marks the boundary between the Valley and Ridge Province and the Blue Ridge Province. There is no mistaking that this is mountain country. Steep topography and abundant plant species abound.

And just as the Doe River shaped the future of roaming and restless Scots-Irish and other immigrants, in the larger scheme, so did the great Valley and Ridge of East Tennessee.

From the region's music to its history, men and women in East Tennessee have been molded by the mountains. Their foods as well as their fates were fastened to the hills. It is a rich history, slowly ebbing away as development rolls up the ridges and valleys in ever more larger ways.

But the past always presents a view into the present. We were shaped by the hills, the folds and layers, and by the hills we will continue to find our way in this "river of earth," as Appalachian poet James Still wrote, pointing the direction for us. ❖

Fred Brown is a senior writer for the *Knoxville News-Sentinel.* He has been a journalist for forty-four years and is a member of the Scripps Howard Hall of Fame. He is a recipient of the Tennessee Associated Press Managing Editor's Malcolm Law Trophy for Feature Writing and the National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship in Journalism at the University of Michigan. His latest publication is *Marking Time: East Tennessee's Historical Markers,* from the University of Tennessee Press.

HIGHWAYS AND BONES

By HARRY MOORE

"What do you mean soft, black clay?" I said to Lanny Eggers, Tennessee Department of Transportation construction project engineer in Elizabethton, Tennessee.

"It's so soft the dump trucks and bulldozers are miring up in the black mud," Lanny said. "You need to come up here to Gray and look at this and tell us what we need to do to make the roadbed stable. I'll have Larry Hathaway, our project inspector, meet you or who you send to the construction site."

"We probably need to undercut the soft clay and backfill it with graded solid rock material," I suggested to Lanny. "I won't be able to make it tomorrow, but I'll send someone."

What followed the next few weeks and months turned out to be the most exciting and amazing turn of events in my thirty-four years of work as a geologist with the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

"Another typical construction problem involving the wet clay soils of East Tennessee," I thought, as I planned to send one of our other geologists to investigate the problem. Due to the complicated geology of the area, special technical attention for highway design, construction, and maintenance is usually needed. Geologists and engineers in the TDOT Geotechnical Engineering Section, Region One office in Knoxville, provide that special technical assistance.

As routine highway construction projects go, this one started out as an ordinary

Dark gray to black soft clay uncovered in May of 2000 along a section of SR 75 in Gray, Tennessee. Photo courtesy Harry Moore.

road building project. However, what started out as a routine shift of roadway alignment to improve a serious dip and sharp curve in the road ended up being one of the most incredible fossil finds not only in Tennessee but east of the Mississippi River.

In May of 2000 a Tennessee Department of Transportation road construction project unearthed soft gray to black clay deposits during the widening of a state highway in Gray, Tennessee. The road project on state route 75 was less than a mile long.

About 500 feet of the new road construction crossed an old deposit of lacustrine sediments, first identified by Larry Bolt, staff geologist with TDOT in Knoxville. Following Larry's initial visit in late May of 2000, he became attuned to the thin-layered sediments that composed the gray and black clay material.

Thus began a period of fossil finds unprecedented in Tennessee.

Geotechnical concerns surrounded the soft clay deposit and how to mitigate the unstable roadbed material. Removing the material and placing back graded solid rock was being considered when bone fragments and teeth began showing up in the excavated material. On May 31, 2000, Larry was showing geologists from the Knoxville office of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Division of Geology, the unusual clay deposits when they began to find bone fragments in the black soil. Thus began a period of fossil finds unprecedented in Tennessee.

The month of June 2000 became the "month of discovery" at the road construction site in Gray. When animal skulls, backbones, ribs, and leg bones of mammals were uncovered, TDOT stopped work in the affected area to assess the site. We did not know exactly what we had found, but the fact that the bones were mostly articulated told us they had lain undisturbed for quite some time. The enameled teeth that were found were perfectly preserved.

One of the first red flags about the age of the fossils came when Rick Noseworthy, TDOT biologist and environmental coordinator in Knoxville, found an unusual clay-covered mass at the site. Cleaning the football-sized clump of clay revealed a peculiar skull, that of an alligator, an unlikely find in an Ice Age deposit.

Bones of a number of animals were found during June 2000. With the help of Paul Parmalee and Walter Klippel, two University of Tennessee anthropology professors, and Marta Adams, a UT anthropology student, we were able to discover and identify numerous fossil animals and establish a general listing of those represented by the uncovered bones. These included tapirs, elephants, turtles, frogs, and the alligator skull, as well as many plant leaves, lignite, and seeds. However, there was one large tooth and a partial jawbone I found that we did not recognize at first. It later changed the complexion of the fossil deposit as we know it.

These bones were so well preserved that we all thought they must have been recent remains, but the bones seemed heavier than normal. When first uncovered, they were a rusty, red-brown color but quickly altered to a dark gray-brown within an hour or so of being exposed to the air. You could actually watch the bones change from a bronze or rusty color to a drab, gray-brown hue.

Plant remains were so common that they were hardly looked at by the bone hunters. Lignite-like material, woody plant remains that are a type of low quality coal, was found almost everywhere at the site and included twigs, branches, and even logs of trees.

Near the end of June, it was decided by TDOT to have the contractor, Summers-Taylor, Inc., stop work in the area so that TDOT staff could evaluate the situation. This was an area of about two acres near the intersection with Fulkerson Road, just down the road from Daniel Boone High School.

At the direction of then Tennessee Governor Don Sundquist, a team was formed in July to investigate the fossil deposit. The team, headed by state archaeologist Nick Fielder, included representatives of TDOT, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, the University of Tennessee, and East Tennessee State University.

It was first thought that the deposits were of Pleistocene age (10,000 years to 1.8 million years old), but fossils later identified by university specialists as being rhinoceros changed the relative date to the Miocene Epoch (at least 4.5 to 5 million years old and possibly older). The mysterious large tooth and partial jawbone I had found in June 2000 turned out to be the rhinoceros.

The deposit may represent the remains of sediments in an old sinkhole-lake or pond. The sinkhole quite possibly contained a spring that issued water. The animals lived in and around the sinkhole-pond environment and included tapirs and crocodilian species. Other animals may have come to the pond for water or food. The area is estimated to include about five acres and is believed to include a large deposit of terrestrial vertebrate fossils.

The significance of the deposit is that the animals were living in the environment they ended up being buried in, creating a complete context of the geologic history for that span of time. The climate, the vegetation, the animals, and the sedimentary record are all preserved in the clay deposit.

This site represents the first terrestrial Miocene deposit found in Tennessee which includes Miocene age vertebrate, invertebrate, and plant fossils. It is anticipated that this new Miocene site will rival in importance the famous Cretaceous-age Coon Creek fossil site in West Tennessee, known for the presence of over 300 different species of mostly marine invertebrate animals approximately 65 million years old.

TDOT engineers and geologists and the research team evaluated three alternative proposals for completing the road project: building the road in the same place but allowing researchers to remove and salvage what fossils they could in a short time period; building a bridge over the fossil site in the same location where the road was to be located; or relocating the road alignment to the north, entirely outside the fossil site, therefore preserving it for scientific research and education.

The governor and the commissioners of Transportation and Environment and Conservation made a visit to the site that summer in 2000 to see firsthand what the commotion was all about. They were given a tour of the site and shown some of the fossil bone specimens. Camera shutters clicked

Tapir skull that was uncovered in June 2000. Photo courtesy Harry Moore.

and reporters anxiously wrote down the governor's remarks. The Nashville entourage was greatly impressed by what they saw.

The road was realigned to avoid the fossil deposit at the direction of Governor Sundquist and Commissioner of Transportation Bruce Saltsman. The fossil deposit is now known as the Gray Fossil Site.

Shortly after the decision to relocate the road, the governor's office provided funding for the hiring of a vertebrate paleontologist at ETSU. Dr. Steven Wallace was hired to oversee the excavation and research.

Before leaving office, Governor Sundquist and Bruce Saltsman presented ETSU a Transportation Community Enhancement Grant of $8 million to construct a visitor center/museum and research facility.

This great scientific discovery required the cooperation and teamwork of a multidisciplinary group of professionals, which included engineers, geologists, paleontologists, archaeologists, biologists, and university professors and administrators as well as the support of government officials. The success of this discovery is attributable to the excellent communication and cooperation among the professionals, local citizenry, interest groups, and politicians who have brought the fossil site to its present protected state.

If the Tennessee Department of Transportation had not been building this road, most likely the Gray Fossil Site deposit would have remained undiscovered. ❖

Harry Moore is a geologist with the Tennessee Department of Transportation.

Author's Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge my fellow workers and others who participated in this great discovery. TDOT geologist Larry Bolt and TDEC geologist Martin Kohl both deserve special recognition for their co-discovery of the first bones at the site.

TDOT Region One engineering director Fred Corum is especially appreciated for his willing support of the fossil site investigation and construction operations. In addition, George Danker and Vanessa Bateman, TDOT geologists, deserve special acknowledgment for their role in discovering fossil bones. TDOT project engineer Lanny Eggers, his assistant Freddie Holly, and field inspector Larry Hathaway secured the fossil deposit and provided assistance in the fossil recovery effort. Special thanks to Rab Summers of Summers-Taylor, Inc., the grading contractor on the Highway 75 project, for aiding the effort to save the fossil remains.

University of Tennessee personnel who contributed significantly to the discovery include Dr. Paul Parmalee, Dr. Walter Klippel, Marta Adams, Dr. Mike Clark, Dr. Bob Hatcher, and Chris Whisner (UT-Knoxville), and Dr. Michael Gibson (UT-Martin). Geologists from the Tennessee Division of Geology who were also involved in the discovery and recovery of the fossil bones include Bob Price and Peter Leminski.

Special thanks go to Nick Fielder, Tennessee state archaeologist, for his organization and operation of the Gray Fossil Site research team. Special acknowledgment is also given to Dr. M. Voorhies with the University of Nebraska and Dr. Alan Holman with Michigan State University for their help in identifying rhinoceros, turtle, and crocodilian species.

Finally, appreciation is gratefully given to former Governor Sundquist, former Commissioner of Transportation Saltsman, and former Environment and Conservation Commissioner Milton Hamilton for saving the fossil deposit for science and education and for providing the funding for a museum and research facility there. Current Governor Phil Bredesen and Transportation Commissioner Gerald Nicely have continued their support for this remarkable project.

ETSU and General Shale Brick Natural History Museum and Visitor Center. Photo courtesy museum archives.

RECONSTRUCTING THE ANCIENT ECOLOGY OF THE GRAY FOSSIL SITE IN TENNESSEE

By LARISA R. G. DESANTIS

Have you ever sat by a window, gazed out across the horizon, and wondered what that environment was like millions of years ago? As I child with a love for natural history museums, I remember staring up at the amazing fossil animals of years past and picturing herds of mammals grazing in downtown Los Angeles. Now as a doctoral student studying paleoecology, I use scientific techniques to reconstruct ancient ecosystems. These techniques include the use of chemical signatures in tooth enamel to determine the diets of ancient mammals. Reconstructing the Gray Fossil Site in Tennessee, a unique find because of its location in time and space, will improve our understanding of ancient environments and the context of vertebrate evolution.

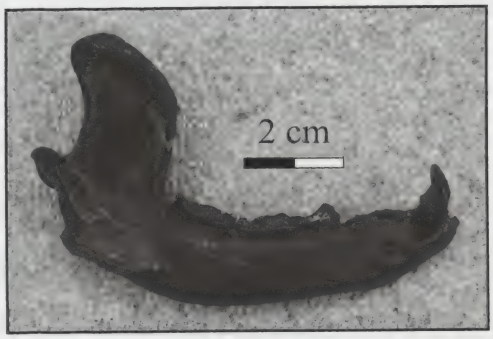
The site's mammalian occupants hold clues to their environment in their teeth. In the past the relative size and shape of teeth were used to infer the diets of extinct mammals, based on modern mammalian analogues. For example, teeth that are taller than they are wide are thought to indicate the consumption of grass. This is because grass contains phytoliths—glass-like structures that wear down tooth enamel over time. However, our understanding of mammalian diets has been improved by the advent of stable isotope techniques. Stable isotopes are chemical signatures that record clues of ancient food and water consumed.

Stable carbon isotopes, such as 13C and 12C, naturally occur in plants and vary depending on how a plant conducts photosynthesis. Because ratios of 13C to 12C do

Skull of the first complete rhino found at the Gray Fossil Site. Photo courtesy Steven Wallace.

not change over time, we can look at ancient ratios similarly to current 13C to 12C ratios. These ratios tell us if a plant uses C3 photosynthesis (e.g., hardwood trees, coniferous trees, cool season grasses) or C4 photosynthesis (e.g., warm season grasses). Thus, by analyzing the carbon isotopes in tooth enamel we can determine the types of vegetation consumed by occupying animals.

Stable oxygen isotopes, including 18O and 16O, occur in water. Similar to carbon isotopes, oxygen isotopes of water consumed are recorded in the tissues of animals, including tooth enamel. Because oxygen isotopes can provide us with information on relative changes in temperature and precipitation, stable oxygen isotope analyses can elucidate ancient climates.



Reconstructing the paleoecology of the Gray Fossil Site began in the summer of 2004 during my first visit there. Upon arrival I was amazed by the abundance of fossil tapirs. It is the most fossiliferous tapir site to date, and I wondered what all of these tapirs ate. Was their ancient diet similar to that of today? In addition to the tapirs, other herbivorous mammals such as rhinoceros, peccaries, camels, and ancient elephant-like creatures called gomphotheres, were present. By understanding what all of these animals ate, I can then begin to reconstruct what Gray, Tennessee, was like millions of years ago.

When visiting the site and East Tennessee State University, I bring along a Fordham drill, drill bits, filter paper, and a few other necessities to collect tooth enamel. While early stable isotope sampling methods included smashing fossil teeth into little bits, current methods are more refined. In the lab I carefully sample approximately one to two milligrams of tooth enamel by drilling into the tooth. A tiny mark is left, typically one-half to one millimeter wide by two to three millimeters long. The enamel is then placed in little containers and taken back to the University of Florida for preparation and analysis.

Back in Florida, the enamel is cleaned with chemicals to remove contaminants. Once all the contaminants are removed, the remaining enamel powder is analyzed on a mass spectrometer, a machine that determines the isotopic ratios of the tooth enamel. The carbon ratios are then compared to modern plant ratios to determine the diets of the animals.

Carbon and oxygen isotopes are also compared through the time of the tooth's development to determine relative seasonality. By drilling a series of samples parallel to the growth axis of the tooth, I can compare the isotopes of these samples to determine how diets varied over the course of one to two years and how temperature and precipitation varied over the same span of time. If stable isotope ratios are very similar over time, then we can infer that the environment was aseasonal—lacking seasonality. However, if stable isotope ratios are variable, increasing and decreasing over time, then we can infer that Gray had a similar climate to that of today.

In addition to the use of stable isotope ratios, the analysis of rare earth elements can help determine if all of the fossils were deposited at a similar time. Rare earth elements are chemical elements that occur in small quantities. When animals die, their bones absorb these elements. Because the elements vary depending on the depositional environment of the animals, we can

Jaw of red panda found at the Gray Fossil Site. Photo courtesy Steven Wallace.

determine if fossils sampled died in similar environments. Thus, in analyzing these rare earth elements by drilling tooth enamel, we can determine if the animals died in similar locations.

Chemical studies of tooth enamel provide necessary information to understanding past environments. Soon the results will be published and our knowledge of the Gray site's ancient ecology will bring about a more comprehensive understanding of the past. Were tapirs browsing leaves as they do today or grazing in grasslands? Did the ancient rhinos from the Gray site consume grass similar to modern white rhinos or leaves similar to those eaten by modern black rhinos? How was the climate compared to today? Did animals of different diets die in similar environments? These answers will soon be known through chemical analyses of tooth enamel.

Next time you visit a natural history museum, look at the fossil animals and know that clues to the past are in their teeth. ❖

Larisa R. G. DeSantis is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Zoology at the University of Florida. She has been conducting research on the Gray Fossil Site since 2004.

The Old Linemen Say

By DORY L. HUDSPETH

it has something to do with moon signs.

Or maybe it's the changing nature of emptiness.
Be careful when you dig.

Sometimes so much dirt comes out
of a hole, you have to spread it around,
pile it up. It seems so much more
than the space the pole takes up in the ground,
an unexplainable abundance.
It's gifts you didn't know you had
or what to do with.

Sometimes the dirt you auger out of a hole
is not enough to refill it
even with a pole's dimension added.
Then you have to dig another hole
to get enough dirt to tamp in,
hold the pole upright. You work
to fill in what is lost, but create more holes,
a spreading loss. The old linemen say,
that's the way it is with dirt and holes.
Don't ask what it means.

Dory L. Hudspeth is a poet and freelance writer whose work has appeared in *Sow's Ear Review, Shenandoah, Runes, Wavelength,* and other magazines. Her first book of poems is *Enduring Wonders.*

WHY IS IT CALLED THE "RHINO PIT"?

By STEVEN WALLACE

When you visit a fossil site or archaeological dig, ever wonder how they come up with their goofy nick- names? Whether referring to a particular specimen or an excavation unit, they always seem to make the strangest choices. Well, I'm not sure how other scientists do it, but nicknames are earned on my digs. This is the story of how Test Pit 2-2004 at the Gray Fossil Site earned its title . . . at least, the name we use in the field. It's the story of the "Rhino Pit."

Tennessee's Gray Fossil Site is a 4.5-to-7-million-year-old lake bed formed in a sinkhole. Because the lake would have been a magnet for life, recovered fossils include everything from fish, frogs, and salamanders, to short-faced bears, saber-toothed cats, and rhinos. The site even contains a strange, shovel-tusked elephant whose protruding lower jaw held flat, bladelike lower tusks used for stripping the bark off trees and tearing up vegetation. Though fossil remains of this host of animals can be found almost anywhere on the nearly five-acre site, most of the active excavation has focused on the western edge of the deposit. Therefore, in the summer of 2004, two test pits were opened in an effort to locate more productive portions of the site.

Test pits are the easiest way to locate fossil-rich sediments. In a perfect world, we could open sections of the site at random in a true test of the fossil richness. Unfortunately, reality is dictated by both time and money. In other words, we need to dig where the fossils are. Test Pit 1-2004 initially consisted of three squares (paleontology

Illustration by Karen Carr.

slang for three square meters, our standard digging unit), opened in a straight line. Productivity was low, and it was quickly abandoned. Test Pit 2-2004, however, consisted of four squares and seemed a bit more promising based on some initial finds of isolated tapir material. Consequently, I decided to shift our small crew of students and volunteers to this pit.

Known as the "Bumblebee Pit," after a student found a bumblebee nest the hard way while clearing away the surface vegetation, Test Pit 2-2004 seemed like an ideal location for the summer digs. It was in an area that we had not explored and was on fairly high ground (we had water issues in one of the lower pits the previous year). After about a month of active digging with only minor success, Dr. Richard Hulbert of the Florida Museum of Natural History hit paydirt. While crowded in the small pit with two other people including me, he encountered a fairly large chunk of bone. At first we did not realize what we had, until Richard uncovered a complete femur that was over a foot and a half long. Recognizing it immediately, Richard informed us that it was Teleoceras, a short-legged, pot-bellied rhino common throughout North America (including Florida) during the Miocene (the age of the fossil site). Over the next week we cleared away the sediments to reveal the entire pelvis, both hind legs, and the tail. At this point we already had the most complete rhino of any kind in eastern North America. Moreover, Richard noted that our rhino seemed unusually big compared to its counterparts in Florida.

At first we did not realize what we had, until Richard uncovered a complete femur that was over a foot and a half long.

Although Richard had to go back to Florida, my team and I continued to pursue this skeleton. Recognizing the long task ahead, we spent a day erecting a temporary shelter over the pit. Though it protected us from afternoon thunderstorms, its primary purpose was to keep the Tennessee sun off both the workers and the exposed bone. Under our new haven, we chased the skeleton by opening new squares. First adding three, then two more, then two more once again. It made for incredible "highs and lows" while digging because the opening of each new round of squares meant at least a week or two of fairly uneventful digging before reaching the proper depth. However, after nearly nine more weeks of digging, our perseverance paid off. The skeleton was articulated (still in anatomical position), so new squares first produced vertebrae and ribs, then the shoulders and front legs, then neck vertebrae, and finally the prize, the skull. We recovered every single bone except one front hoof core, making ours one of the most complete rhino skeletons in North America.

But the skull added an interesting twist to the story. Back when Richard was still digging with my team, I managed to find two fetal rhino bones near the pelvis—wonderful miniature versions of the adult we had been working on, but clearly from an unborn calf. The assumption was obvious: We were working on a pregnant female. However, the skull told us otherwise. Males of this type have huge lower tusks that were sharpened by smaller, upper tusks. Because the males used these for fighting over mates, the females didn't need them. Their lower tusks were reduced and no bigger than your thumb. Our skull had tusks bigger than bananas and polished to a razor-sharp edge. The skeleton was clearly a male. So where did the baby come from?

The end of the field season hinted at our answer. After we had removed the en-

tire skeleton from what we were now informally calling the "Rhino Pit," I decided to have our crew clean up the pit for the winter. We do this at the end of every season. Essentially, we level out the floor and clean up the walls. On one cool morning in late September, a volunteer from Northeast State Community College (in a class led by Sherry Twork) yelled that he had found something fairly big. Assuming that it was just another tapir bone, I took my time walking over to investigate. To my astonishment, I recognized his find immediately. It was an ankle bone from another adult rhino!

Though exciting, isolated bones are common at Gray, so I tried not to get my hopes up and told myself this was all we would find. However, I had everyone digging that day focus efforts on this potential new find. Within only a few hours, I was pleasantly proven wrong. The volunteer students were slowly uncovering portions of a front limb of another articulated rhino. Though significantly bigger than the first, it was clearly another Teleoceras. Could this be "mom"? Dying to know the answer but knowing that it was late in the year, I reluctantly decided to chase the forelimb but not open any additional squares. Within a little over a week, we recovered nearly all of a front left limb, lacking only a few of the toe bones. The missing elements would have to wait for next season.

However, like all good plans in paleontology, circumstances would dictate changes. In the summer of 2005, Tennessee Department of Transportation funding that had been obtained to build a museum at the site was finally released, and construction was imminent. Because the new museum was going to sit on the edge of the site, I had my crew excavate where the foundation would be to ensure that no fossils were lost during full-scale construction. Mom would have to wait another year.

Of course, sometimes curiosity gets the best of you. While talking about the new rhino with a volunteer and her father one afternoon, I couldn't help but think about those missing toes. Excavation at the museum location had been fairly unproductive, so I asked the two if they would be interested in "rhino toe hunting." Of course the answer was yes, so the next two days were spent draining and cleaning the Rhino Pit (the dense, clay-rich lake sediments tend to make the pits act like swimming pools, quickly filling with water when not occupied). Sure enough, a single morning of digging produced the missing toes, making the left front leg complete. But again, I knew better, so we returned to the museum digs.

The fall of 2005 brought significant change to the fossil site with the initiation of construction. But with this flurry of activity came new hope for the 2006 field season. We would finally be able to go after "Big Boy," the second large rhino, and find out if it really was mom, or if the new nickname would be correct.

Though the winter seemed to last forever, the summer of 2006 finally came. After a small, weeklong excavation of a nearly complete alligator, all efforts focused on the Rhino Pit. I had my team open seven squares based on how I predicted Big Boy would be positioned. In a little over a week, we hit the jackpot, encountering a string of vertebrae

Brian Compton excavating the torso of the first complete rhino found at the Gray Fossil Site. Photo courtesy Jim Sledge, ETSU Photo Lab.

and ribs. Work continued throughout the summer, and again we recovered a nearly complete skeleton. To our surprise, the name was correct. This was another large male. So again, where was mom?

As with the previous year, museum demands dictated a change in plans and the 2006 season was temporarily stopped in mid-summer. At that time, we had not yet found the hind legs of Big Boy, and as would be expected, "Here is where the plot thickens." While excavating the hind legs, I noticed they were nearly perfectly articulated. Sound strange? Well it should. Remember that the first bone we found that told us to go after Big Boy was an ankle bone. You can't have three hind feet! That first bone actually does not belong to Big Boy, meaning there are at least three adults in this pit along with the baby. Although the official designation will remain Test Pit 2-2004, this unit will always be the Rhino Pit to us.

It turns out I was right. The initial ankle bone was just an isolated find. The fact that it was next to a complete rhino skeleton was just a coincidence. However, it does show that you never know what you will find until you dig. And dig we shall. Another rhino pelvis has turned up and could finally be mom. In addition, the Rhino Pit has produced more than just rhinos. The 2006 season saw our first complete lower jaw of our unique red panda (Pristinailurus bristoli) and a complete ground sloth femur. In addition, we found numerous tapirs including our first truly complete one. We nicknamed it "Snapir," but that's another story. ❖

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Lottie

By JUDY LEE GREEN

Skinny as a garden snake
bean-pole tall
chicken-legged
snatch-headed
wrinkled as a washboard
toothless as a newborn
her weathered face
the color of an old saddle
sunk in like a forgotten grave
but her eyes twinkle and her grin
is as big as a half-moon fried pie.

I think I look pretty good
For an 80-year-old woman who bore 10 children.
How do you think I look? she asked.

Hidden within the wrinkles of her furrowed face
stories are buried in each rut and can be dug
as easily as potatoes from a hill of brown dirt.
Beautiful, I say
as I start to dig.

Judy Lee Green of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, won the James Still Award for Poetry at the Appalachian Writers Association Conference in 2006.

LOOKING FOR LAND

By JIM MINICK

We had no money, and during the school year, we had little time, but still, for the first two and a half years Sarah and I lived in Floyd County, Virginia, we searched for land. Our rented place was fine, but not ours. And if we wanted to homestead, we needed a home to stead. We looked for signs on back roads, or traveled on daylong tours with local realtors.

Once we discovered an abandoned farm and even went to the courthouse to trace down the owners. Though the seventy acres hadn't been worked for years, the homestead had all that we thought we needed: woods, south-facing fields (now overgrown), and a spring that watered the original home, a two-story house just barely standing. Daffodils and tall lilacs bloomed and sprawled in an overgrown rambling, surrounding the gray clapboard. We wanted to reclaim this place once loved.

I called the Reeds, the names on the deed, and they said yes, they might be interested. The next evening, we pulled into their driveway, the house surrounded by dozers and track hoes, evidence of his work as an excavator. Red-headed and slightly round, Mr. Reed sat us down in their living room on overstuffed chairs and his wife served us sweet tea. We talked hunting and schools and gardens, then got down to the property, the homestead of his grandparents, the place where his now-deceased mother grew up. He told us a little of the history, of where the springs seep, the best place to drill a well. We didn't talk price, though it was on everyone's mind, because he said he'd have to talk to his uncle, who still owned half, and lived in West Virginia. Within a week of our visit, he called and said his uncle had to think about it but sounded positive. After two months of waiting, we finally heard that the uncle had changed his mind; he was no longer interested in giving up his homeplace.

The first time we fell in love with a place enough to bid on it, Ted Bobbitt was the realtor. A rounder, shorter version of Kenny Rogers, Ted drove us in a clean but rusty

Photo montage by Sara Peters.

Jeep Cherokee, his bearded chin pointing the way. He took us to a spread that came down off a ridge, flattened out to hayfields, and had oak woods thick with rhododendron on the back. We wanted to see the stream, so Ted led the way, hacking at the brush with a stick. In the densest thickets, he'd turn around and go through butt first. "You don't lose your hat that way," he explained, "and you don't get hit in the face." We followed suit, the limbs paddling us along the way, the hill dropping to a small trickle of a stream, but water nonetheless. The forty acres had several houses nearby (we wanted more quiet), but the price was close to what we might muster. A few days later, we met Ted in his office and drew up a contract.

The process of searching teaches you what to look for, what you really want, or don't, what you can tolerate, or won't, what you can afford, or not.

I had studied a thick book on buying country land, written by a lawyer out in California. A lawyer, I figured, knew what to do in such matters, so I followed his pointers, checking over the contract, changing this or that, surprising Ted, I thought, with our knowledge. Then came the blank to fill in with our offer. In his book, the lawyer wrote with emphasis to always make your first bid at half the asking price. This we did. Looking back, I don't know how Ted kept a straight face but he did, and not only that, he wrote the number in the blank and finished the paperwork without commenting on the offer. The next day, Ted called us to say that the owners rejected the bid and didn't even offer a counter; they had been insulted by such a low amount and shut the door on any future offers from us. We thanked Ted and moved on.

The process of searching teaches you what to look for, what you really want, or don't, what you can tolerate, or won't, what you can afford, or not. We liked the sense of one hundred acres, giving us woods for lumber and firewood and wildlife. We liked open land for market gardens and blueberries and whatever else we might raise, including maybe animals. Good neighbors would be nice, "good" for us meaning friendly and helpful, but also able to stay away. We liked our privacy. And like all searchers, we wanted water, to hear its constant rush, watch the life it draws and gives and releases. A house would be nice, if it was liveable, and not too ugly; we needed someplace to live while we learned the land and discovered what to ask it, and what it might ask of us. All of this, of course, for a good price.

On another late summer Saturday, another realtor, Gary Long, drove us into the next county, turning off the main highway onto roads that narrowed, then turned to dirt and paralleled Burks Fork, a wide, clear stream full of riffles and pools. We saw the familiar survey tape, marking the corner, as the realtor said, "This is it." We looked out over a broad meadow framed by the road on one side and creek on the other. Cattle grazed it, but I could easily see blueberry bushes, could imagine picking by such sweet and constant water music.

Most of the 130 acres was timber, and most of that had just been harvested. So while the stream and meadow cleared the consciousness, the woods clogged. Spokes of dead pine stabbed the air, and piles of treetops filled each clearing. Blackberry vines sometimes covered the debris, but we knew the mess underneath. We bumped over the skidder roads in a Suburban, Gary pointing out the old house site, the remains of a bridge, only the good.

For the next few weekends, we traveled back to that place, learning the curves of the road, the turnoff by the white cinderblock church. We were falling in love with this land's potential, already trying to figure

out what to do with the timbered mess. But we were also doubtful about the location. It was private but also over an hour from my school. I couldn't imagine spending so much time on a daily commute.

On one visit we wanted to hike the acreage divided from the rest of the property by the road. A neighbor baled hay a half mile upstream, the tractor's steady hum slipping through the wind as we hiked up the trail. This hilltop too had been logged, and it too required climbing through masses of slash. Seeking the property lines, we scratched through briars to come out on a level plot of land where we both stopped short. I didn't know the land had a cemetery, had missed the tiny square on the photocopied plat. Ivy covered an iron fence, the vines creeping into the woods, draping over the tombstones.

There were only two, square gray granite, unadorned, with only the names. We walked closer, grabbed hold of the fence to lean over and read through the vines.

"James Reece," I said, "how about that?"

Sarah didn't respond, then said, "Jim, look at the name on the other one."

It read "Sarah Reece." We both felt the tingle, the sudden quiet of recognition. Were we destined to be there, to buy this place despite its ugly mess, this place that on it already had our names engraved? We left the cemetery, found the boundaries we had set out for, and headed back.

The farmer baling hay was just finishing up as we drove by, so we stopped to introduce ourselves, to get a sense of what he might be like to live beside. A small man, gray hair poking out of his cap, face and arms brown with sun, he shut off the tractor and said, yes, it was a nice place, even if they did log the hell out of it. And yes, he knew Jim and Sarah Reece. She died in that creek one night, slipped off the footbridge and drowned in a flood. Took them a day and a half to find her. We thanked him for his time and headed home.

The realtor called a few days later, and we said no, not interested anymore, the commute too long, the history too marked. ❖

Jim Minick teaches at Radford University and farms in Wythe County, Virginia. His most recent work includes *Finding a Clear Path,* a collection of essays from West Virginia University Press, and an interview with Wendell Berry in *Appalachian Journal.*

SHOVELING DEEP INTO THE FAMILY CEMETERY

By DUSTIN HIGGINS

In rural Southern Appalachia, the duties of a good neighbor are many, and among them are some that might come as a surprise. Suffice it to say that good neighbors should always have that bit of extra sugar handy in case it is needed, keep the yard clean and orderly for the appearance of the community, ensure that they are always there to help the community, and . . . dig a grave? It's still practiced in Unicoi County, Tennessee, as well as other regions in Appalachia, but the tradition is dying out, preserved only by rural churches.

I was about seven years old when I attended my first grave-digging. It was neither traumatic nor life-changing, as I can't even remember my exact age. My duties included carrying water to those digging the grave, and, more importantly, counting the number of times the wheelbarrow was emptied. The diggers included my father, my uncle, neighbors, and friends of the grieving family.

By the time I was in high school, I took part in the digging, unlike past duties of counting and toting. The digging, of course, was all done with shovels and picks. The tools for measurement included a wooden frame and two sticks cut to a specified length, all of which had been used by the church for the past fifty years, if not more. Two men, at most, could dig in the measured area. When the grave reached five feet, only one person could dig. On average, at least

Funeral procession for Private First Class Orville Hensley, killed in North Africa, 1943. Photo courtesy Laura Wilson.

ten people showed up for the digging. So while a few dug, the others talked. Once the grave was finished, a tarp was used to cover the area, and the measured soil put to the side for covering the grave. If the ground was not filled with rocks, a grave could be dug in two or three hours.

The development of community grave-digging can be seen in the life of my great-grandmother. For Katherine Hensley, who was born in 1900 in the Spivey Mountain area, there was very little money. Her father was a farmer, like his father before him, and was successful enough in business to provide for his family, but he made little in profit. Extra resources were used for the living, not the dead.

In his book *Death and Dying in Central Appalachia*, James Crissman observed that "death was a part of everyday life in the United States. The average life expectancy in 1900 was only forty-seven years and the mortality rate for all age groups was high."

For a small community like Spivey Mountain, death was ever-present, and there was very little time available to prepare the body and get it into the ground. In some cases a coffin had already been built, or if the unfortunate had gotten seriously ill, he or she would have already been measured for a casket. As soon as death occurred, the body was washed and clothed, and the men of the community gathered to dig the grave. A runner was typically sent out to inform the community of the death and the time for digging.

The family cemetery was usually located on the top of a hill, decreasing the chance of flooding. At that high point, the deceased was considered closer to God and heaven, facing toward the sunrise on the crest. And from a more practical point of view, the ground was not good farmland. Digging the grave could quickly go from shoveling dirt to chipping away at rock. Having the grave on a hill added to the difficulty of getting the coffin to its final resting place. Crissman recounted one instance of a man who had to transport a coffin to a particularly high cemetery. After reaching the top, he claimed, "If she doesn't make it to heaven, it ain't my fault. I've already carried her halfway there."

As soon as death occurred, the body was washed and clothed, and the men of the community gathered to dig the grave.

The nature of the small farming community ensured that everyone was at least acquainted. Because there were few occasions for everyone to gather, visitation to the grieving family quickly became a social event. While the women cooked and brought food to the house of the grieving family, the men set about shoveling the rocky earth. Of the digging, Crissman writes, "Digging the grave was generally a social affair. While two people worked, the others reminisced about past experiences with the deceased that they had enjoyed, told tall tales, and true stories, discussed the latest news of the community, and talked about other graves that they had dug."

The 1950s brought a lot of change for Katherine Hensley and the rest of the Spivey Mountain community. A paved road brought easier access and better means of transportation. Trips to the county seat, Erwin, required less effort and wear on vehicles. Funeral homes were now just a short drive away. Still, people insisted on digging graves themselves. It was generally thought that anyone who had to hire the funeral home to dig the grave must not have been well-liked in the neighborhood. Soon, though, the community grave-diggings began to decrease. Funeral homes were hired to do the job. Isolated family cemeteries were abandoned for larger, well-kept public cemeteries.

The act of digging the grave for the grieving family by the community began as a practical and courteous way of showing respect. It helped the family out in funerary costs and was the quickest way of having the grave dug and the corpse buried. When finances allowed more people to rely on funeral homes, originally exclusive to the more affluent, the tradition diminished. It became more of a burden to use the private family cemeteries in the mountains, so many turned to the public cemeteries.

As the twentieth century came to a close, the only instances of community gravediggings were in small, local churches. Katherine Hensley died in 1996, and I helped dig her grave, along with a handful of other men. My great-grandmother had lived almost a century and was buried in the same manner as her parents. Her grave was dug by her family and neighbors. ❖

Dustin Higgins is a graduate student in history at East Tennessee State University. He is currently working on his thesis, entitled *Dying Traditions: A History of Community Grave Diggings in Unicoi County.*

A FELLOW DIGGER

Terry Bradford was born on June 13, 1952, to Andy and Pearl Bradford. He was raised in the Spivey Mountain Community and has lived there all his life. He was eight years old when he attended his first grave digging, and his responsibilities were to bring water to the diggers and count the wheelbarrows of dirt removed for the grave. Since then, Terry has helped dig over thirty graves, most for members of his home church, Mountain Dale Freewill Baptist, where he is a deacon.

"It's a way to show your respect for the family and a way for you to do something for them," Terry says. "I remember if someone didn't show up to help with the digging, others would say, 'He won't have enough friends to dig his grave.'"

Terry hopes his practice of digging graves with a shovel will continue but also accepts the fact that it's not as widely practiced as it was when he was a child.

"I'll keep on doing it until I can't anymore, and then it'll be up to the younger ones to continue it."

Terry teaches building trades at Unicoi County Vocational School.

Terry Bradford. Photo courtesy Terry Bradford.

OF GRAVES, GRANDFATHERS, AND WILD LEEKS

By LORI TUCKER-SULLIVAN

Only a dead man could bring together this group hiking the acreage of East Tennessee on a fall day. Ahead is Leroy Hartsell, a farmer in overalls and muddy boots. His family goes back so many generations in Tennessee that he's lost count. Bob Labreck walks beside Leroy. Bob is a detective, now retired to Tennessee after thirty years on the Orlando PD. My parents, Tennessee natives, now living sixty years in Michigan where they went for work, slowly come along behind us. They are in their eighties, their frames smaller and less erect than in the years they lived in Tennessee. The South is woven through their genes, their accents now softened but still apparent in the occasional phrase. Detroit is where they lived, but never their home. Their birthplace will always be home—it's a connection that deepens their character in ways foreign to those who live their lives in one place.

I walk in the middle, strangers in front, parents behind. I have been only an annual visitor to the emerald and gray Smoky Mountains, having grown up in an urban landscape. The five of us, having never gathered before now, are here playing detective, looking for my grandfather's grave.

I am writing a memoir—the story of my mother's Tennessee childhood in the 1930s. My grandfather, Carlton Huskey, died of typhoid when his children were ten, eight, and six. His death left my grandmother to

Blanche Winn Huskey and Carlton Huskey. Photo courtesy Lori Tucker-Sullivan.

raise her children alone—an unremarkable fact until you know that my grandmother was blind. Her eyesight was lost at age five by the slash of a branch as she and her brother constructed a tree swing. Many considered it miraculous that my grandmother married and gave birth at all. But to marry again after becoming a blind widow with three children simply didn't happen. So the family got by, with children becoming adults overnight. My grandmother's brother Charlie, the person who let the tree branch slip from his hand and into her eyes, never married, and spent his life in helpful penance to his sister.

We have found thick files of information on my grandmother, from family records of her time at the Tennessee School for the Blind. But my grandfather, the long lost man whose grave we seek, is mysterious to us. My mother's memories of him have grown dim. He was a salesman—away for long stretches traveling through Tennessee and North Carolina in a blue Buick company car, selling men's suits. He was tall and lanky, with delicate features and a round face, made rounder by circle-framed glasses. He walked the streets in pinstriped suits, a fedora topping his head in winter, a Panama hat when the breezes blew warm. Everything about him was different from what he really was—a country boy who grew up poor in the mountains of Tennessee during the early years of a new century. My mother knew no one else who owned a car, much less one that someone else paid for.

My grandfather sold clothing for Hamilton Tailoring Company. He sold suits to men who cared only that they lasted for two occasions—their wedding day and the day they were buried. The rest of the time they hung still in closed chiffarobes with mothballs while those men wore denim and cotton, materials that mirrored their lives—heavy, stiff, and mostly faded pale from too much hard work.

Of all our discoveries, perhaps the most difficult to learn was that my grandfather was unfaithful. His cousin Georgie had told us he had a mistress—a woman who lived in Maryville. Photographs in a tattered box also provided clues. In each of them, he appears relaxed and smiling, always wearing a suit and tie. In one, he's leaning against the huge Buick, doing his best impersonation of a gangster. In another, he lounges on a hillside. Each photograph has been carefully cut, close to the outline of my grandfather's thin frame, the remainder of the picture long discarded. Those pieces likely contained the image of his girlfriend. On the back of one photo, my grandfather's handwriting instructs its recipient to be careful in sharing it with others.

He walked the streets in pinstripe suits, a fedora topping his head in winter, a Panama hat when the breezes blew warm.

In Maryville visiting his girlfriend, my grandfather became sick. He couldn't stay where he was, nor could this woman bring him home to his wife. So instead, she brought him to his mother in Newport, miles from his family in Tellico. In Newport, he became bed-ridden and wrote letters home saying he would be back as soon as he could make gas money. He sat in bed while his mother canned apples.

"I sure wish she could make apple butter," he wrote in a letter, "but it's near impossible to get sugar." My mother and her siblings wrote in their responses that they were fine; that their Uncle Charlie was working occasionally, making money and helping to buy food.

He wrote his last letter on October 14, 1933. By the time it arrived in Tellico, he was already dead and buried. A telegram arrived on October 16 notifying his family of his death the day before. My mother remembers skipping up the single step to the front porch of their house, having run barefoot from school along the gravel streets of town. She and her sister and brother found the telegram on their mother's lap. My grandmother sat on a chair in the hallway, just inside the door. She held a handkerchief between her thumb and index finger and pulled nervously along one edge until she reached the corner, then turned the cloth and started again.

"Some man come this morning and brought this telegram," my grandmother explained. "The man that brought this said it's against regulations for him to open it, even for a blind woman. You girls need

to read this for me so I can know what it says."

The older children read aloud the telegram written in soft gray pencil. "Husband died this morning. STOP. Funeral tomorrow. STOP."

My mother's memories of that day and those that followed are worn like antique lace stored at the bottom of a hope chest. Each time we talk they become less complete, more frayed around the edges. She knows that Uncle Charlie accompanied the family across the state. They packed into a borrowed truck and drove to Newport for the hastily arranged funeral. Because of the illness, my grandfather was buried quickly, taken to a field behind the home of a friend, Floyd Hartsell. It was one of the few recollections my mother still possessed of this childhood tragedy. That his girlfriend arrived at my great-grandmother's home and was allowed to say her goodbyes to her boyfriend, while my blind grandmother sat unaware on the porch, became a cause for lasting divisions within my grandfather's family, according to Cousin Georgie.

My grandparents' meeting, courtship, and marriage are among the greatest mysteries of all. Why this man who couldn't stay in one place married this woman who was blind is a question that has no answer, although it may once have. My grandfather's letters to his wife were filled with affection, apologies for being away, and gratitude for his wife's family, who were present in his stead. In the time that he lived with his family, my grandfather whistled and joked and made believe his daughters were twins, although they were born two years apart. He took them for rides through the hills in the Buick, careening on mountain roads until the children tumbled around in its

back seat. And though they were loved and cared for by aunts, uncles, and grandparents, my mother and her siblings were also pressed into service early and taught that this service to their disabled mother was their purpose in life. After my grandfather's death, it became a certain fact for my mother, one that never went away.

My mother and her family visited their Newport relatives often—sometimes for entire summers—but they never went back to the field behind the house where their father was buried to lay a marker in remembrance of his brief life. So my grandfather's final resting place remained as mysterious as the man himself. This bothered my mother as the years passed and she said goodbye to her family—her brother to an accident, her sister to Parkinson's disease, and her mother and uncle to old age. I challenged myself to find this single plot of earth, somewhere in Tennessee.

A search of library records revealed a list compiled by volunteers who travel the back roads recording forgotten cemeteries. Through these records, we discovered my grandfather's name in one such inventory. The librarian sent records that showed him buried in an unmarked grave, in another family's plot. It put the cemetery location as behind the Hartsell home, at a place called Kineauvista Hill.

The librarian explained that anyone in town could direct us there, because the hillside is the location of the annual ramp festival. A ramp is a wild leek, I learned, common to this area of the country. An email to one of the festival volunteers led to Bob Labreck, the retired Orlando detective, who latched onto my search for a grave as a perfect project. Bob soon informed me that he had located the cemetery, and he awaited our visit.

How many times had I ridden these roads, with these two people? I've surely lost count over forty-two years. Because my grandmother forbade my mother to marry, my parents eloped. They crossed the state line into Georgia with friends and married in a civil ceremony. Shortly after, they sought freedom from childhood responsibility and the hope of union wages in Detroit. The two of them have traveled to Tennessee almost annually as visitors, spending a few weeks each summer with brothers, sisters, and parents. This time, we traveled from

Vivian and Lillian Huskey, the author's mother and aunt.
Photo courtesy Lori Tucker-Sullivan.

Michigan to Tennessee just before Thanksgiving. The bare trees of the North gave way to fall color still remaining in Kentucky and Tennessee.

We met Bob Labreck at a gas station in Newport and followed him to the spot he had located, a small cemetery at the base of Kineauvista Hill. It was trimmed and tidy, with graves marked Williams, Williamson, and Hartsell. Two dogs lying on the sunny porch of a house across the road ambled over, welcoming us to this rarely visited spot. We opened a gate and trudged through dry grass into the cemetery.

I pulled out the papers from the library and found the names on the markers didn't match those on my list. Although we knew that my grandfather's grave was unmarked, the people buried alongside him were a family named Dunn, who were not at this gravesite. I went to my mother, who was walking among the marble, dusting off headstones, making connections with the graves as though at a high school reunion.

"I remember playing with this Williams boy when I came here," she noted. "I heard he died in World War II." I walked with her for a short time and explained that my information said we were in the wrong place.

Bob suggested we drive up the road, to the Hartsell house. Leroy Hartsell, a man who had always lived on this hill, would know anyone buried on the land. After brief introductions, Leroy smiled. He remembered my mother's family—distant relations in some way. We asked about a Huskey in an unmarked grave, and he pointed us over a high fence across a field. We headed south on foot, my parents climbing over a three-foot locked gate that kept neighboring land secure. The mountains surrounded me as I walked. We were held in the palm of this rich green land, with a mild autumn sun over our heads. I felt settled as I hiked, thinking that marked or unmarked, this is a pretty good spot to spend forever.

"There's my Grandpa Floyd's old place," Leroy said, as we passed an abandoned house with ivy clinging to its gray siding.

A stranger would certainly walk over these spots, never knowing that someone's bones lay beneath, never thinking to remove his hat.

"That's where we went," my mother recalled. "I remember being told that we were going to Floyd Hartsell's house."

We left the open field and ducked under trees, to a low spot covered with layers of leaves. With my mother's recollection, we were certain of our trek. Leroy removed his Tractor Supply cap as he neared the unmarked graves. The plot was no more than a slight indentation under a small patch of trees. A stranger would certainly walk over these spots, never knowing that someone's bones lay beneath, never thinking to remove his hat. But Leroy remembered only three people buried in this spot—my great-grandmother Fanny Huskey Wines, her second husband, and a member of his own family. He scratched his head, realizing he had located the wrong Huskey. He thought more about my grandfather, realizing that he had died young.

"You're looking for the older graves out by the barn," he said, directing us the way we had come. Varying greatly in age and fitness, we turned and made our way back across the field, toward a low barn just behind his home.

"This is it," he said, pointing to a patch of wild raspberries growing behind the rusted frame of a swing set. My mother looked around, uncertainty on her flushed face.

"We tried to keep this up," Leroy said, apologetically. "But those raspberries just take over. They come back just after we cut 'em."

I pulled down my sleeve and pushed aside some canes. Inside I saw more indentations, like those in the woods. There were a few marble blocks, tilted sadly, looking tired and alone. Leroy explained that the Dunn family, whose graves were there, had a few markers. My grandfather did not. Leroy's wife joined us then and told us that she knew of two unmarked graves there, a man and his infant son.

"There are graves here?" I asked, surprised, not just that we found my grandfather's burial place, but that we located it in someone's yard, just steps from their back door.

My mother stood quietly, trying to understand that this was her fa-

ther's place, along with her brother Marshall, who died as a baby after contracting measles. My mother was five when Marshall died and remembered only that my grandmother held him for nearly an hour, unable to tell that he had died in her arms until a neighbor came and told her so.

After a hushed moment, my mother walked to our car, ready to return to Knoxville where we were staying. I thanked my new friends, the detective from Orlando and the farmer, who had shared their time and welcomed strangers to this land and its memories. There was nothing more to do, no gravestones to clean or flowers to plant. We drove back in silence.

My aunt inquired about our success as we pulled into her drive. "Did you find it?"

"No, we didn't," my mother replied, shaking her head and pressing her lips.

"Yes, we did," I corrected. I thought of the hours I spent talking with librarians and searching the Internet. My thoughts were not on what we had found but that we had found anything at all. I opened folders and spread out the paper trail of documents that correctly described the places we had been. The farmer's memories, along with his wife's corroboration, confirmed that we had been successful—in all the land that comprised Cocke County, Tennessee, we found the three-by-five-foot patch under which Carlton Huskey had been buried seventy-two years before.

I have since come to realize that my mother did not find what

she wanted. She wanted—indeed needed—more than a patch of grass covered in unruly vegetation. While I felt that the beauty of the place made it perfect, she was looking for something more. She needed something to make up for a lifetime of loss—her childhood, her father, and all those who once shared her maiden name. To know her father was in a space that was pretty, that was tended by someone, was what she needed. To find him like this, lost long ago, and since then so disregarded, broke her heart all over again.

As we work on our memoir, I continue to tease family stories from her memory. I realize that our recollections are what we make them to be. She has struggled silently with vague remembrances of a father she now knows was neglectful and philandering but was also a source of laughter and affection. Her memories of a demanding mother have softened into feelings of awe and admiration. And the most painful memories, like the death of her young brother, have almost left her completely.

I know in this process that just as my mother comes to terms with events in her life, I must also make peace with how and what she remembers. I know that my mother will set free some parts of her past —that sometimes the only way to live with something is by letting loose of it. Some recollections will linger, welcomed for the comfort they bring. Yet others will be made softer with time. I suppose we all manipulate some of the memories we dig up, if even just a little. And perhaps this is what helps us endure. ❖

Lori Tucker-Sullivan is originally from Detroit, Michigan, and now lives near Ann Arbor. While growing up, she spent several weeks each summer visiting family in East Tennessee and still returns there at least once each year. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and communication from the University of Michigan. For the past four years, she has worked as executive director of the Independent Booksellers Consortium, Inc.

Carlton Huskey (his mistress likely scissored from the photograph). Photo courtesy Lori Tucker-Sullivan.

DIGGING FOR HERITAGE:
Lisa Alther's Search For Her Melungeon Roots

By WAYNE WINKLER

A babysitter was the first person to threaten young Lisa Alther and her unruly siblings with abduction by Melungeons. "We were pretty bad children, so we got threatened a lot," Alther laughs. "The Melungeons had become, by that time, the boogeymen who supposedly lived somewhere on the outskirts of town and would come in and punish bad children. The story went that they had six fingers on each hand and lived in the trees and the caves outside of town. That was my first acquaintance with Melungeons."

It wouldn't be her last. Lisa managed to behave well enough to avoid capture by swarthy cave dwellers with extra digits and left her hometown of Kingsport, Tennessee, to become a widely-acclaimed novelist. Beginning with *Kinflicks* (1976, Alfred A. Knopf, New York), Alther created a body of work dealing in large part with identity and sense of place. But through her voyage of discovery—both in her work and in her life—a mystery remained.

"Everything that I've ever written has been an attempt to figure out who I am. Many of us have to go on a journey to sort out who we really are." In the mid-1990s, Alther's journey brought her to the discovery that some of her ancestors may have been the legendary and fearsome Melungeons. Her latest work is *Kinfolks: Falling Off the Family Tree: The Search for My Melungeon Ancestors*, published in April by Arcade. It is a departure from fiction, a memoir of her research into the Melungeons and her own relationship to this mysterious population.

Lisa (pronounced LI-za) Alther grew up in Kingsport, an industrial Appalachian city very similar to the settings of her first two novels, *Kinflicks* and *Original Sins* (1981, Alfred A. Knopf, New York). She studied English literature at Wellesley College. After graduation and marriage, Alther worked for Atheneum Publishers in New York, had a daughter, Sara, and the family moved to Vermont, then to London, then back to Vermont. Alther, now a proud grandmother, currently divides her time among Vermont, New York, and Tennessee.

Along the way, she has published five novels that examine stereotypes—cultural, regional, and sexual—and the real people behind those stereotypes. Her work possesses what both the *New York Times Book Review* and *The Nation* refer to as "comic genius." Following *Kinflicks* and *Original Sins* came *Other Women* (1984) and *Bedrock* (1990), both published by Knopf in New York, and *Five Minutes in Heaven* (1994, Dutton, New York). Her books have sold over six million copies and have been translated into sixteen languages.

Alther has also published numerous reviews, stories, and articles in publications including the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post,* and other periodicals. "The Melungeon Melting Pot," published by *New Society* in April 1976, recounts a trip to Hancock County, Tennessee, in search of the menacing people with whom her former babysitter had threatened young Lisa and her siblings.

The Melungeons are a mixed-ethnic population first documented in the Clinch River region of northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia in the early nineteenth century. In the mid-twentith century, researchers would label them and dozens of similarly obscure groups as "tri-racial isolates" with European, African, and Native Ameri-

Lisa Alther. Photo courtesy ETSU Photo Lab.

can ancestry. The Melungeons were sometimes featured in newspaper and magazine articles, but even in Kingsport, less than fifty miles from the Melungeons' traditional population center in Hancock County, the Melungeons were known—if at all—primarily through folklore. Stories about counterfeiters, 800-pound moonshiners, six-fingered cave dwellers, and Civil War bushwhackers fed the imaginations of generations of Appalachians.

Alther's curiosity about Melungeons over the years led her to the little information that was available. While legend and feature writers ascribed various exotic ancestries to the Melungeons, most academics believed that they and similar groups were simply the product of Colonial-era inter-ethnic unions. Generations of discrimination and ostracism had made the very word "Melungeon" an epithet, and when Alther met a friend of a friend in Sneedville, she received a chilly response to the question "Are you a Melungeon?" As she writes in *Kinfolks*, "She gave me a look that could wither a stalk of celery...I remember too late having been warned that calling someone a Melungeon in Sneedville is like calling a black person a nigger." Failing to meet any actual (or at least acknowledged) Melungeons, Alther concluded that the romantic legends surrounding them were likely concocted to relieve the tedium of life on remote Appalachian farms and that while elderly Melungeons were still around, the children were trying to escape that heritage.

In Alther's first novel *Kinflicks*, the protagonist Ginny dates a Melungeon boy named Clem. She based the character on some of the kids who lived close to a farm her father owned near Jonesborough. "At the time and in retrospect, I don't believe they were Melungeon. I had all this Melungeon lore in my head and I wanted to use it, so I took some of those kids and put them together to make a character and turned him into a Melungeon."

For the next two decades, Alther explored issues of her own identity in the pages of her novels. In 1994, the year *Five Minutes in Heaven* was published, one of Alther's distant Virginia cousins published a book that would come to have a great impact on her as well as on thousands of others. Brent Kennedy's *The Melungeons: The Resurrection of a Proud People* (Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia) revived interest in the topic and theorized that the Melungeons descended in part from Turkish, Middle Eastern, and North African people who arrived on the North American continent and intermarried with Europeans, Native Americans, and Africans.

Alther hadn't known she and Kennedy were related until a friend, knowing her interest in Melungeons, gave her a copy of *The Melungeons*. Reading Kennedy's account of his family lines, she realized that they intersected with her own. When they met in person, Kennedy showed her the scars where extra fingers had been removed from his hands when he was a child. Alther realized that the six-fingered boogeymen were real, and she might well be one of them herself.

Alther initially envisioned writing an historical novel, but coming to definitive conclusions about the origins of the Melungeons is no easier today than when Alther first heard of them; researchers remain sharply divided in their theories. Moreover, she was unable to find a publisher for the historical novel. "One of my old editors in New York said, 'This is a great story. Why don't you just tell what really happened as you were researching trying to figure out your identity?'"

Like Alther's novels, *Kinfolks* is a well-told story, filled with humor and awareness. Also like her novels, *Kinfolks* deals with Alther's own issues of identity and of place. Writing the memoir of self-discovery had a liberating effect. "I realized that the business of belonging to a community is simply a label that is put on us by outsiders. Your real dialogue is with yourself. I think I've just given up trying to fit in, or to think that I could fit in, to any group. I don't even want to anymore."

But the Melungeon story of ethnic and cultural blending has significance to Lisa Alther beyond her own heritage. "It is possible for groups that are at each others' throats, like Muslims and Christians and Jews and people with skin of all colors, to come together in peace and love. And I carry that in my own psyche. Of course, I've been struggling, trying to make peace with all those elements for most of my life. But I think I have made peace with it." ❖

Wayne Winkler, president of the Melungeon Heritage Association, is director of public radio station WETS-FM on the campus of East Tennessee State University and is the music editor for *Now & Then*.

MEDITATION ON A GROUNDHOG BROOD

By DAN STRYK for Danny Marion

– I –

We'd spied them rutting, in late March, among our hillside brush. A single mound of quivering fur above our garden patch, guarded by mere daffodils we plant each autumn's end. We *knew* it was all over, once again.

And soon those kits of early spring, large-headed as primeval sloths *and* piling on dun-matted-girth to swiftly rival *her*, were making one Grand Salad of our newly risen lettuce, cabbage, climbing peas—whose spray of purple petals would *once more* not light the mornings of mid-May. Doomed as that dull season when they'd plundered our small plot for the first time (we'd *prayed* would be the last) the year before. But now, again, I knew *too well* I'd also lose my sunflowers they'd nibble like an afterthought: just enough to shred fresh buds before turning to rich stems of flowering broccoli they prefer … a second loss of gold-rayed flowers my wife plants each year around the garden's rim for *me*.

And even more, we dreaded the *sad sight* of our tomatoes—she'd again patiently staked—dangling only half-munched while still green, along with every edible wild herb or flower-head they'd partly wreck while waddling up or down that trail to their high den. The path mown through thick brambles for our climbing ease after we'd settled in a house bought from an old Appalachian gardener who'd warned us what we'd "need ta do" beneath their long-ancestral home crowned by thick tuliptrees. Or over time

Illustration by Randy Sanders.

they'd multiply, no longer shy, "ta gobble all ya grow."

– II –

So now my wife has sworn to give up gardening. *Small* food source that *enlivens* us, worth so much more, in those free months, than pocket-change we save. That verdant feast of morning eye, touch of stem and smell of earth beyond the nobs and dials of our varied household tasks . . . loss of even more than *purple flowers* of the pea: whose pods we'd pluck and chew ("tasting the sun") while pulling weeds. And *saddest*, her prized morning glories dangling ragged from the trellis *in gnawed strands* by early June. Remnants of their plodding but sly waddle down that sloping path they've claimed, sitting upright *of a sudden* on plump haunches: sniffing air and listening for our stirring, where they peer from blinds of daylilies (*too bitter* to devour) and thornbushes, that shadow them, toward our bedroom screen . . . bolting back, like impish vagrants to their burrows, at our slightest groan or shifting of the sheet.

But, "*no*," we tell our shotgun-toting neighbor, Mike, who raises "beagle pups" in chicken wire curled around his shed, and clears unwanted "critters" for the neighborfolk—whose gardens are their pastime in our slow Virginia town—for a few bucks. ("Don't even have ta know about it"; he's not yet given up on us: "Y'all barely hear the shots.") Communal pride and order *we deny*—but witness, a bit glumly, as our neighbors ("ridda critters" that he's "put a little dead in") tend to cabbagerows and flowerbeds watched summerlong from shaded decks in rockers with ice tea, until early morning harvest in straw hats and weeding gloves . . . . But *then* we pay him *too much* for the trout he sometimes shares with us, caught with pals below South Holston Dam. In hope he doesn't think us merely "cheap," or queer unfriendly "Yanks."

❖ ❖ ❖

So nights when we're awakened by the sour gust of a wasp-nibbling skunk around our front-yard hedge, or early concert of a "mocker" whistling soulful for a mate of silky grey, we imagine their large touching heads and bushy tails far down in holes beneath the shrill of cricket-life and katydids above our backyard hill. That *Dream of Primal Life* we've been lured into—not only dreamt through summer but *the mind's year round* . . . . Dream of "early life" we feel *inside*, despite their clumsiness and greed—a sacrifice of "summer yield" for something learned about ourselves . . . with lifted eyes and frowns. And gentle laughter. ❖

Dan Stryk's five collections of poems and prose parables include *The Artist and the Crow* (Purdue University Press) and *Solace of the Aging Mare* (The Mid-America Press).

WE "DIG" APPALACHIA

By RANDY SANDERS

Managing editor's note: Recently I had the good fortune to hear a talk by Dr. Steve Fisher, professor emeritus at Emory & Henry College. He shared his personal journey to answer, for himself, what it means to be an Appalachian. His self-imposed question became a classroom tool as well. He said, "Thus, they [his students] came to see and accept the reality of multiple Appalachian experiences, taking into account the specificity and diversity of who they are. In the process they came to understand that only the willingness to share private experiences, to tell their stories, enables them to create a collective description of the world that is truly theirs."

I asked three champions of Appalachia to share stories that, for them, speak to the question, "What does it mean to you to be an Appalachian?" I am deeply indebted to them for so willingly sharing of themselves, and equally indebted to Dr. Fisher for unwittingly framing the course of this article.

A résumé is an odd thing. There, on paper, is a shorthand version of a life's experiences, encapsulated for others. And yet a résumé, like an address or a credit score, does not truly tell who "we" are.

What follows is an introduction to three very accomplished Appalachians with weighty résumés and little time to think or care about the weight of those résumés. These are three "doers and shapers" who, through their respective vocations, passionately give back to a region they love. While it is impossible to write about them without mentioning HandMade in America, the Appalachian Regional Commission, East Tennessee State University's Quillen Chair of Excellence in Teaching and Learning, and the Southern Regional Education Board, this article is more colloquial than formal. Meet Rebecca Anderson, Anne Pope, and Mark Musick.

Rebecca Anderson

A day with Rebecca Anderson is like a day in the sun. She shines. As the executive director of HandMade in America, Becky (as she quickly asks you to call her) oversees a nationally-recognized organization. And lest you think "nationally-recognized" is a bit of overused hyperbole, one look at her travel schedule or her recognition in 1999 by *U.S.News & World Report* as one

Photos courtesy Rebecca Anderson, Anne Pope, and Mark Musick.

of "America's Top Twenty Visionaries" lays that concern to rest.

HandMade in America, founded in 1995, is a nonprofit organization based in Asheville, North Carolina, with a mission that celebrates traditional and contemporary crafts, protects resources and communities, and promotes a twenty-three-county service area to the world. In shorthand, it's about an economic model built on "place-based" outcomes, but in a deeper sense, it's about honoring and supporting the sacredness of community.

As a seventh-generation western North Carolinian, Becky recognizes the richness of Appalachia. "You know, I travel all across this country, and what I see is a country that is starved for connection. We just had a group here yesterday from the AEO [Association for Enterprise Opportunity], and they brought in folks from different parts of the country: Colorado, Nebraska, California, New England. We spoke with them about what we are doing at HandMade in America, and it was so obvious they are hungry for what we're about. For one thing, they're hungry for good news, and for another, they're hungry for a sense of community.

"We don't talk a lot about the history of civic life in Appalachia, but it's always been here. I grew up in a family of educators. My grandmother was a teacher, my father and mother were teachers, my brother was a teacher, I was a teacher, my son is a teacher; in fact we are five generations of teachers. That legacy of education set us apart in an interesting way, but because of who my folks were, our family was really ingrained with about everybody. I'm an ol' populist because of that. I'll give you an example: When my father died, so many people came to the wake that they had to call the sheriff's department and have

them route and reroute traffic to the funeral home. And standing in the receiving line that night, I cannot tell you how many people said things like, 'You know, your daddy paid my last tuition at NC State. I couldn't make that last quarter.' I bet my daddy helped keep more people in college, and none of us ever knew it.

"I had a wonderful childhood. I remember my brother Fred, who's older [Fred Chappell is a writer, poet, and North Carolina Poet Laureate Emeritus], used to ramble through the pastures with me. We set fire to the barn one time pretending we were a cowboy and a cowgirl. We would get into the creek, and he would show me how to get leeches off. That was fun, and I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

"And today, I guess because of my upbringing, I will ramble anywhere, anytime. I can get to a meeting on time and without any trouble, but it's the getting back that's hard because I'll think, 'Well, that looks like an interesting road.' I don't care where I am, I'll just take off down the road, figuring it out as I go."

Becky is spunky, and she gets it honest. "My brother wrote this in one of his books: My daddy was a great prankster, so our household was pretty much fun. Grandmother's church women's group would come to the house, and one special thing grandmother could serve was a box of Whitman's candy—you know, not many people bought boxed candy. Each woman would take a piece of that foil-wrapped candy and pinch it. So one time, my daddy took all of those candies out and wrapped little bantam eggs in the foil; put them back in the box, and when those ladies took those candies out and pinched them . . . *squish*. My grandmother was just livid that he had done that to her church circle. But she just adored him, and he knew that, so he did stuff like that all the time."

And what does she say about being an Appalachian? "To me, part of it is about the land; part of it is the heritage because that heritage is still here; and because I grew up in a family of educators, language and literature is a huge part of it for me. And I'm just enough of a feisty, independent soul [her maternal grandmother once won the Farmers

Mrs. Frank B. Davis, Rebecca Anderson's maternal grandmother and past winner of the Farmers Federation haystacking contest. Photo courtesy Rebecca Anderson.

Federation haystacking contest] to tell you that it is the legacy of the mountain spirit.

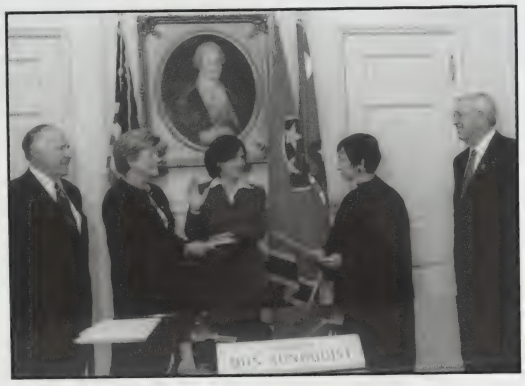
"I don't ever look at being an Appalachian negatively, and if you want to hear me get on a soapbox and preach, I can do that about the negativity of Appalachia. To make us the brunt of this country's jest angers me to no end. My Appalachia is filled with extraordinary, ingenious resourcefulness, but we're seldom given credit for that resourcefulness and ingenuity.

"The hidden mission of Hand-Made is to give value to the undervalued. We have this great legacy of the handmade object that has been here for hundreds of years. It's truly a precious gift. If I put on my old industrial recruiting hat [she previously served as the director of economic development for the Asheville Chamber of Commerce], I like to nag people and say, 'This celebration of our living culture, this economic engine that we're nurturing, doesn't require incentives, or tax abatements, or water or sewer lines, or a highway. It is here, with a capital H, and we need to value it.'"

Anne Pope

A conversation with Anne Pope quickly becomes a story of American symbols. Her father's family came to America from Hungary by way of Ellis Island. Her mother's family opened their first store in 1929—the year the stock market crashed—and yet retained all initial hires throughout the Depression. There is solid Appalachian backbone in Anne's family stories.

In February 2003 by a unanimous confirmation vote of the U.S. Senate, Anne B. Pope became the tenth federal co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission. Established by an act of Congress in 1965, the ARC is a regional development agency representing a unique partnership of federal, state, and local governments. There are fourteen commission members: the governors of the thirteen Appalachian states and the federal co-chair.



When asked about her work at the ARC, Anne responds without hesitation, "This is one of the best experiences of my life. It is such rewarding work. I love Appalachia, and I feel very fortunate to serve the people of Appalachia."

Her common-sense approach to the work of the ARC was demonstrated in an interview she gave during the fortieth anniversary of the agency. The question was what advice she gives to state and local leaders about planning for the future, to which she answered, "When I travel across Appalachia, I'll see what look like almost identical communities—same general size, same natural resources, and so on. But some are moving forward and some aren't. The ones moving forward have three things in common. First, they have a vision and a plan. Second, their plans are regional, not for just one community or one county. Third, everything in those plans is locally driven—the goals and the strategy for meeting those goals. We often say around here, 'If the problem is in the community, then the solution is in the community.' They already know that they need infrastructure investments, including telecommunications. They know that workforce development is extremely important. What I tell them is that real change can't come from outside. They have to find ways to make it happen from within."

That sense of "making it happen from within" runs deep on both sides of Anne's family. Her mother, Leslie Parks Pope, comes from one of the merchant families that was part of a unique partnership between the Belk brothers of North Carolina and their clerks. These young clerks, with names like Parks, Hudson, Leggett, Matthews, and Stevens, went on to open their own stores. Anne points out that her maternal great-grandfather became an owner of stores, but he didn't start out that way. "He started as a floor sweeper and worked his way up."

Anne's father, Dr. Joseph W. Pope, carries an equal amount of determined grit in his family's

Anne Pope being sworn in as Tennessee's Commissioner of Commerce and Insurance, November 1999, as her proud parents look on. Photo courtesy Anne Pope.

legacy. "My father was one of nine children. He took advantage of the G.I. Bill to become the first in his family to graduate from college, and he then went on to dental school. As a young girl I remember going with him to southwest Virginia. He was the only periodontist within a hundred miles of Kingsport [Tennessee], and he would travel to the people who needed care. I remember people lined up to see him. I thought he was like a rock star!"

"I feel like I am who I am because of where I came from," Anne says. "I was raised with a sense that I could be whatever I wanted to be; that I could do whatever I set out to achieve. That's a real gift.

"I learned the value of work from my family and the importance of service to others as well. Those are certainly traits I think of when I think about what it means to be an Appalachian. In fact, I think the in-migration into Appalachia is fueled in part by people who sense that we value community; that we care for and about one another.

"Another trait that comes to mind when I think about Appalachia is a love of land. I inherited that from my maternal grandfather. He loved the land; he loved his farm.

"He also loved watermelon. When I was about seven or eight, he would take me on business trips with him. We would stop at a roadside stand where he would pick out the perfect melon. Then, we'd travel on until he found a scenic place to pull off the road, park beneath a tree, and cut that watermelon right there on the hood of the car. It didn't get any better than that—sitting in a cool spot, looking out over beautiful surroundings, and eating watermelon with my grandfather."

The Appalachian-born historian and author David McCullough once said, "Real success is finding your lifework in the work that you love." Anne Pope has come a long way from her Kingsport paper route days, but listening to her stories, it becomes clear she has found the kind of success McCullough described.

Mark Musick

Body language is often a not-so-subtle indication of a person's demeanor. Mark Musick leans into a conversation—engaged and in-the-moment. The path that brought him to East Tennessee State University as the Quillen Chair of Excellence in Teaching and Learning is rooted in his friendship and years of working with ETSU President Dr. Paul E. Stanton, Jr.

"The reason I'm here is that I got to know Paul Stanton, but if Paul had been a college president in Florida or Texas, I don't think I would have joined him there. It was the chance to 'come home' and apply my experiences here that was the clincher."

Born in Gate City, Virginia, after World War II, Mark readily admits to being an overachiever. "Most people who know me would say I am a modest person, but I've always had a drive about me. A high school counselor once made the mistake of telling me that I was ranked number two in a class of nearly 200 in my freshman year. I was bound and determined to graduate at the top of my class. I did achieve that goal and surpass the person who had been number one . . . and then I married her!"

College quickly focused the young valedictorian's mind. "I took a math class, and out of thirty students I was ranked pretty much at the bottom. Part of that [he says with a smile] was my innate mathematic ability, but part was also that all the other kids in the class had had pre-calculus and calculus. They also had not had the football coach as their geometry and trigonometry teacher."

Still, that drive to excel added line after line to the education section of his résumé: undergraduate and graduate degrees from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; an honorary doctor of education degree from Piedmont College; an honorary doctor of laws degree from Mercer University; and an honorary doctor of humane letters degree from the College of Charleston.

A young Mark Musick contemplates the future. Photo courtesy Mark Musick.

Before coming to ETSU, Mark spent thirty years of his professional career with the Southern Regional Education Board, where he served as president of the board, and previously as vice president and director of state services and information. Founded in 1948 as America's first Interstate compact for education, the SREB is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that helps government and education leaders in its sixteen member states work together to advance education and improve the social and economic life of the region. Member states include Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

When asked if he is encouraged by the direction of education in Appalachia, he carefully chooses his words: "On the big picture, I would say, 'Yes, I am encouraged.' But, by nature, I am an optimist, so you should take that into account. Having said that, I think the direction is upward. Mind you, if we set low standards and then congratulate ourselves for achieving those standards, we're doing a disservice to future generations. There can and should be pride about being from these mountains, but you have to make sure pride and accomplishment are in the same bracket. We have to set our educational standards high enough to compete with the rest of the country, and we are fooling ourselves if we do not think in global competition terms as well."

Mind you, if we set low standards and then congratulate ourselves for achieving those standards, we're doing a disservice to future generations.

The importance of education is one of the foundational stones on which Mark's life is built. "I'm not sure I can talk about this without choking up," he begins, "but my father worked for the Mead Corporation [a paper mill] in Kingsport. He left that job—and a very good job it was—to start a business. But he came to see the handwriting on the wall that he wasn't going to get his four children through college on what he was making. So, he went back to work at the Mead, even though he knew he would lose his seniority." Each summer during his undergraduate years, Mark worked in that same mill. "Like any summer employee, I was given the lowest-of-the-low jobs," he said. He worked in the paper finishing department, a large room with stacks and stacks of paper. Finishers, mostly women, fanned through those stacks, dropping the inferior sheets on the floor. Men came behind them, picked up the paper, and threw it into large bins. Mark's job was to pick those sheets up and haul them to another section of the plant for recycling.

"I'll never forget what one of those ladies said to me one day. She said, 'You know, what you're doing now is the same job your father did all last summer.' He never told me that. He never complained about his work. And although college was tough for me, hearing about what my father had done so that I could go to college may have been the most important thing to help me finish."

Digging Appalachia through Stories

There is no single answer to the question of what it means to call oneself an Appalachian. While certain Appalachian stereotypes have long since gained recognition in the popular culture, do we, as citizens of the twenty-first century, care? Of course we do. In a very real sense, such stereotypes represent external oppression.

Our responsibility, though—whether we are walking through an ancestral graveyard or along a mountain path, whether we are singing to a child or telling our stories—is to avoid internalizing such subjugation. And in those moments of doubt, we might look beneath the résumés of Becky Anderson, Anne Pope, and Mark Musick, and recall their stories. Those stories help point the way. ❖

Randy Sanders is managing editor of *Now & Then*.

DIGGING APPALACHIA:
Cycles of Interest from Beyond Our Borders

By ABE WHALEY

Most dictionaries would characterize the slang meaning of "digging" as, "to like, enjoy, appreciate, or take notice of." That is a pretty good description of the attitudes held by an increasing number of Americans concerning Appalachia. And, why not? Appalachia is booming these days. Families who left long ago are returning home, businesses are thriving, and cities throughout the region, such as Knoxville, Asheville, Chattanooga, and Roanoke, are experiencing strong economic growth. Folks are definitely digging Appalachia, but it isn't the first time.

Interest in Appalachia is by no means a new phenomenon. It has come and gone in steady cycles over the last century and a half. To those outside the region, Appalachia is often seen as a mysterious place full of homespun folkways, rough terrain, and rougher people. This mystery drives curiosity, which gives way to interest and investigation. It is Appalachia's abundance of resources that keeps people coming back time and again. But not just natural resources. There are deep reserves of political and cultural resources as well. Early interest in Appalachia could certainly be characterized as being at arms' length. However, in the years since World War II, interest in the region has become increasingly integrated, and it is changing the land for better and worse. To be sure, these cycles of interest have waxed and waned over time, but no matter how

Howell's Grocery, rural West Virginia, 1967. Photo courtesy Archives of Appalachia, Jeanne M. Rasmussen Collection, East Tennessee State University.

calm the lulls, new generations always come along to rediscover Appalachia, digging the land and its people all over again.

Appalachia's original resource of great consequence to the outside world, coal, was discovered beneath the region's ridgelines soon after the country's founding. It was a find that would forever change the land and its relationship with the outside world, and since those early days, coal interests have been digging Appalachia, literally and figuratively. Massey, Consolidated, and National Coal companies, among many others, cut their swath across the Appalachian ridge leaving behind historic coal towns, unseemly slag piles, and a vast network of still-active rail.

According to *National Geographic*, in 1948 there were 125,000 miners working in the coal mines of West Virginia, Appalachia's largest coal producer. Currently, there are fewer than 19,000, reflecting the sharp bite taken out of coal mining employment by a partial transition to surface mining, which now accounts for almost forty percent of the coal mined in the state. Despite the decline in coal mining employment, the industry itself is by no means in decline and still profiting nicely from the land. Coal production is also providing a more contemporary focus on Appalachia from within and without by those concerned with the lasting cultural and environmental effects of the latest, and most destructive, method of extracting coal, mountaintop removal mining. The practice has drawn sharp criticism from local, regional, and national environmental groups and has renewed a healthy debate about the ongoing exploitation of Appalachia and its people, by outside powers too rich and well organized to be effectively opposed.

Coal, however, was not the only resource to draw interest in

Appalachia's early days. Timber companies had a keen eye on the region as well, harvesting timber to feed the great mills and forges that were helping build a nation. Timber companies have harvested almost every acre of ground in Appalachia. Even the Great Smoky Mountains National Park had been almost entirely logged off prior to its official purchase and dedication.

After the great booms in the extractive trades had come, federal, as well as private, interest in another natural resource, the stored energy of flowing water, began to take hold in the early twentieth century. In the 1930s, the federal government was drawn to the region's abundant water resources and the opportunity to generate cheap electrical power by building a series of hydroelectric dams on the Tennessee River system—thus the birth of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Private hydroelectric concerns, such as Appalachian Power in Virginia, the Aluminum Company of America in Tennessee, and Nantahala Power & Light in North Carolina, were also attracted to Appalachia's water resources during this era.

Public and private capital investments in hydroelectric power came in the form of massive dam and reservoir networks along major river systems. Some have considered the human cost of these projects too high as local populations in the river impoundment zones had to be relocated. Furthermore, the public outcry over lost agricultural land and, as a result of the Tellico Dam project, environmental destruction, have created a dynamic interest in Appalachian water policy that continues to the present day as populations within the region and its surrounding areas continue to grow.

Despite the negative aspects of large public hydrologic projects, these early investments yielded measurable returns in flood control, improved river navigability, and cheap electrical power for commercial and industrial use. With the advent of widespread electrification by mid-century, Appalachia's eco-

West Virginia train yard. Photo courtesy Archives of Appalachia, Jeanne M. Rasmussen Collection, East Tennessee State University.

nomic situation began to improve, although not as fast and as comprehensively as had been expected by many.

By the mid-1960s federal government interest in the Appalachian region was born anew with President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty and the integration of the Appalachian Regional Commission into the regional and national political battlefield. President Johnson's 1964 announcement of a federal War on Poverty from Tommy Fletcher's front porch in the hills outside Inez, Kentucky, was a defining moment in the modern history of Appalachia, and in Johnson's political career. It sparked a firestorm of national media coverage within the region, focusing on the most isolated pockets of Appalachian poverty. This coverage streamed into living rooms all across America. Many within the region were unhappy with the often condescending slant of national media attention and its propensity for reinforcing regional stereotypes. However, the attention initiated a fury of interest in the area by outsiders.

Coming fast on the heels of Johnson's announcement were the two most visible aspects of the War on Poverty and the growing government interest in Appalachia—the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Volunteers In Service To America program. The ARC, which was solely focused on the economic development of the region, institutionalized federal interest in Appalachia. It was able to focus heavily on developing a system of federal highways linking major growth centers, which, consequently, consumed some two-thirds of its budget. The ARC funneled the remainder of its funding into health-care facilities, water systems, airports, and industrial parks.

This top-down focus by the ARC on infrastructure and "growth-center" development as a vehicle to economic prosperity was but one part of a loosely constructed, two-part strategy, often at odds with itself, within the national battle against Appalachian poverty. The second part of the strategy was a bottom-up approach focusing on human resource and community development, executed by the agency directly responsible for doing the work of the War on Poverty, the Office of Economic Opportunity. The VISTA program was one of OEO's most visible outputs, and its legions of young volunteers were eager to contribute to the large federal social program being carried out in the hills and hollows. Where the ARC could be seen building large roads and urging people to move to growth centers, the VISTA program was flooding the small communities of Appalachia with thousands of college-educated young people who initiated local job-training and community-building programs in the hope of making these small enclaves economically viable for local families.

According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, the 1990s saw an in-migration of nearly a million people to Appalachia.

Many of the early VISTA youth hailed from outside Appalachia's borders, and the enduring victory of the VISTA program was their understanding that many of the stereotypes were simply untrue, or, at the very least, not widely applicable. This newfound understanding, in turn, made its way with these volunteers back to their respective communities. Many realized that Appalachia's people were, in fact, hardworking, industrious, keen-witted, and deeply spiritual, people whose slower-paced, more rooted ways of life contrasted starkly with a rapidly expanding urban America. The VISTA program is still alive today, although it is now part of the more broadly conceived AmeriCorps program.

In recent years, many from beyond Appalachia's geographic boundaries have taken an interest in the region and sought to relocate to its forested slopes. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission, the 1990s saw an in-migration of nearly a million people to Appalachia. These new Appalachian citizens have gained a fresh appreciation and deeper understanding of the land and its people. Despite the occasional step backwards, such as the October 27, 2006, *Los Angeles Times* story, "A County of Bad Ol' Boys," concerning the ongoing troubles of Cocke County, Tennessee, many of the old stereotypes are falling away as the level of in-migra-

tion to the Appalachian region continues to grow.

Appalachian newcomers have also driven the development of a stronger and more diversified regional economy. Businesses are answering the call, drawn by cheaper land, lower taxes, and the strong regional work ethic. Where extractive trades and agriculture defined Appalachia in past decades, the twenty-first century Appalachian economy is flush with new, nontraditional enterprises such as medical equipment manufacturing, high-tech research and development, and a variety of new jobs in a growing services sector. DeRoyal Industries, Oak Ridge National Laboratories, and Citigroup are a just of few of the major players in these new industries. Even some of the traditional manufacturing sectors, such as automotive, are growing with great vitality. Toyota has made recent manufacturing investments in the Appalachian region, as have BMW and Mercedes.

Appalachia's new citizens also seem quite interested in, and eager to support, the unique cultural heritage that has long defined the region. This has helped to drive a rebirth of traditional music, art, literature, and tradecraft, although credit for the current Appalachian cultural renaissance cannot be given solely to newcomers. Native Appalachians are taking an interest in their culture with greatly renewed vigor, as shown by increasing attendance at local harvest, music, and art festivals like Prater's Mill Country Fair in Varnell, Georgia, and the Grainger County Tomato Festival in East Tennessee.

The unique musical heritage of Appalachia is probably what people are now digging most deeply about the region. Whether you call it bluegrass, folk, traditional, old time, or mountain music, it comes in many flavors. Crowds at regional bluegrass music venues and festivals are exploding. MerleFest, a traditional music festival held every spring in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, in memory of guitarist Doc Watson's son Eddy Merle Watson, held its first gathering in 1988 with 4,000 in attendance. Since then, MerleFest has grown to a size of thirteen stages with over 82,000 in attendance in 2006.

The Carter Family Fold in Hiltons, Virginia, a mecca for old time music fans in the region, recently experienced a huge renovation to its performance barn, greatly expanding the seating capacity and facilities in order to accommodate the ever larger crowds that pack the Fold every Saturday night. Hollywood even took notice and responded to this renewed interest in Appalachian music by producing a major motion picture, *Songcatcher* (2000), which chronicled the true story of early efforts to study Appalachia's unique musical forms. The film won an award at the Sundance Film Festival.

Mountain literature has also experienced a particularly wonderful rebirth with the appearance of new Appalachian literary masters in recent decades such as Charles Frazier, Fred Chappell, and Robert Morgan. These new masters are landing appearances on Oprah's Book Club, serving as Poet Laureates, and receiving National Book Awards. The work of some of the old masters—Thomas Wolfe, Wilma Dykeman, and Jim Wayne Miller—has experienced a rebirth, particularly in college and university literature and Appalachian studies classes.

And then there are the outdoor enthusiasts. An Appalachian pedigree is a hot commodity these days and earns one a certain degree of caché among the young, active crowd moving to the region for the abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities.

In the coming years, Appalachia will continue to be of great interest to many Americans for a variety of reasons. Outdoor adventure tourism will certainly continue to draw active crowds of urban escapees. Compared to many other parts of the country, Appalachia is still extremely resource-rich, and this will continue to foster interest in what the land has to offer by the extractive trades industries, for good or bad. As Appalachian populations continue to grow, business will also

MerleFest crowd at the main stage. Photo courtesy Merlefest.

continue to grow to meet the needs of all the new faces.

The region is also fast becoming a lightning rod for environmentalists, since it is one of the most biologically diverse parts of America and the damage being done by government and industry may have larger and more far-reaching consequences, over a longer period of time, than previously thought. Further, as the water resources of areas outside the Appalachian region fail to provide for the growth of their respective populations, Appalachia's hydrologic abundance will continue to attract interested parties. Atlanta is already struggling to meet its water resource needs, and interest has been shown in diverting water from the Tennessee River. This is but one example of a problem that is just beginning to surface, a problem that will only continue to grow in importance over time.

People have been "digging" Appalachia for a long time, but few were willing to stand up and admit it. Despite the constant ridicule of media outlets and pop culture, interest in Appalachia from those outside our geographical bounds has, at times, been quite strong. Sometimes outside interest was exploitive and destructive, sometimes it was constructive and benevolent, and sometimes it was destructive by way of benevolence. However, throughout Appalachia's history, the region has presented its own unique blend of mystery, fortune, adventure, and intrigue to those outside its borders. From the early days of timber and coal, to the political hay made during the War on Poverty, to a more recent era of cultural and economic revival, Appalachia has been exerting its subtle pull on people everywhere. The latest round of interest is just beginning to unfold. Few areas of Appalachia will remain unaffected in the coming years, reinforcing the fact that interest in the region will continue to remain high in the decades ahead as ever greater numbers of Americans get the chance to dig Appalachia. ❖

People have been "digging" Appalachia for a long time, but few were willing to stand up and admit it.

Abe Whaley is a ninth-generation native of Sevier County, Tennessee. His work has previously appeared in *Newsweek, Country* magazine, the *Knoxville News-Sentinel,* and the *Mountain Press.* He splits his time between work on a Ph.D. in political science at the University of Tennessee, service in the Tennessee Air National Guard, and various outdoor adventures in the Southern mountains.

THE TRANSPLANTING

By DENISE HEINZE

When I moved to Waynesville, North Carolina, a quaint mountain town west of Asheville, I arrived with preconceived notions of Appalachian people as clannish curmudgeons who would like nothing better than to chase pushy Yankees into the nearest gulch. A native Michigander, I was determined to fit in, which meant pretty much sticking to myself and minding my own business. This would not be difficult given my considerable teaching responsibilities at the local university.

Nearly a year into my new home, less than a mile from town, the chilliness in the neighborhood was palpable. Ernest, a lifelong resident who lived across the street from me, was kind and helpful. But he was also deaf as a post. And only slightly more talkative. We'd go at it for a few minutes, but it was like shooting guns in the air. A lot of noise and nothing to show for it. Except for Ernest, no one had ventured by or seemed to care I existed. Though I never caught anyone spying on me, I distinctly sensed being sized and carefully measured. I felt conspicuous in my contemporary chalet, which looked silly in comparison to the humble and worn abodes surrounding me.

By late spring, the semester had ended and a long summer break ensued. In spite of my continued discomfort with my neighbors, I ventured into my small backyard, visible to everyone on the street, and dug my first garden. A modest affair of cucumbers, tomatoes, string beans, and strawberries, it became the surprising catalyst for one of the most rewarding experiences in my life.

That small garden, no bigger than a vacant city lot, moved, if not mountains, then the people who graced them. Less than a week as a novice gardener, I was startled when I heard a friendly voice behind me. "A

Forsythia in bloom. Photo by Randy Sanders.

garden's a lot of work." I turned to plump, serene Shirley, the middle-aged woman who lived behind me. Trying my best not to appear desperate for conversation, I told her I was new at gardening and wondered if she could give me any advice.

"Got to dig deep. Turn the soil so the roots of the weeds are exposed to the sun. That'll kill 'em now so you won't have as much weedin' later on." She toed a clump of wet sod. "This here was a cow pasture before the developers got hold of it, so it should be real rich with nature's fertilizer, you know." She laughed with her body, not making a sound. "We used to have a garden every year, my husband and me, but it got to be too hard. Saw you out here and missed it. Maybe we'll pick it up again." She lifted her hand to me, turned, and walked off, stumbling over the uneven ground.

Before long, I was seeking advice from my other neighbors, who willingly shared their expertise and tasty produce. In town, I frequented the Irish pub as much for the malt as for head waitress Sue's encyclopedic knowledge of gardening.

"Get you some newspaper," she said, her black hair short, spiked, wiry, just like the rest of her.

"Newspaper." I kept my voice flat, knew better than to sound incredulous or Sue'd take my head off.

"For them tomatoes. Spread a layer, cover it with a couple inches of topsoil, then plant. Mulch real good with pine needles or chewed up leaves. It'll help with the dry rot and the blight."

She saw the blank look on my face.

"Good Lord, darlin', you're as green as my thumb." She skittered off, tray held high, shoulder bones poking out of her too-thin back.

Had it not been for the auto mechanic who changed my oil in nearby Sylva, I would have continued in vain to plant sweet corn on the north side of the mountain.

"Don't get enough light," he'd said, discoursing in his aluminum chair, legs crossed, baseball cap at a jaunty angle on his gray head. "And you got to plant at least four rows, else they won't pollinate. Yep." We sat quietly for a few moments.

"I don't have a south side to plant on."

He stood, put his hands deep in his faded overalls.

"Then you ain't gonna have no corn."

Unwittingly, I stumbled on a common bond simply by digging in and turning my first spade of soil. Over the next few years I would proudly dispense handfuls of excess basil and banana peppers to anyone in need. I would just as gratefully receive what I did not grow—cherry tomatoes, white potatoes, a bouquet of tulips.

But no gift was as precious as the one I received from Nancy. A small, weathered woman in her early sixties, Nancy lived at the end of my long gravel drive in a tiny cottage. She and her husband had rented the house as newlyweds thirty-five years before. When she turned forty, he deserted her and his three children. She somehow managed, but it was evident life had taken its toll. Nancy fought allergies, heart problems, and frequent indigestion. Twice during my time as her neighbor, she was hauled away in an ambulance.

But Nancy was feisty and resilient. She was also a gifted gardener. Though her house was borderline ramshackle, her yard was a perpetual display of creative endeavor. Snow-white peonies in an old truck tire, scarlet tea roses that clung to her cracked asbestos siding, a ruby-red gardenia fresh from a church funeral, preening next to the rusted poles of her clothesline. She hosted the first daffodil in late February and the last brown-eyed Susan in the fall. I especially

envied her forsythia, splashed like lemony paint across her porch in March, and marveled at how she kept her poinsettia alive long after Christmas.

Though I was inept with flowers, I would quiz Nancy relentlessly about them, then drag her into my yard to identify all the local flora and fauna. I respected her knowledge thoroughly. Once, however, we disagreed heatedly about the proper way to prune trees. Nancy was terrified that trees in the power line would snap in a storm and knock out power. With her ailing health and advancing age, this was a real and persistent danger. She insisted that all trees, including my tulip poplar, be topped, a practice I abhorred since it was not only hideous but also significantly shortened the life of the tree. Indeed, the resplendent red maple in her yard was already dying, a victim of excessive topping. When I pointed this out to Nancy, she scoffed, "That ain't gonna hurt that ol' tree." Her unwillingness to respect the opinion of a university professor was more than my obviously fragile ego could take. I left in a huff and vowed not to waste my time with her again.

Her unwillingness to respect the opinion of a university professor was more than my obviously fragile ego could take.

Several weeks passed and I missed my easy chats with Nancy. Though she could be stubborn and opinionated, I found her conversation somehow soothing. She talked as my grandmother had, in a stream, the constant flow of words creating more sound than sense, the rhythm of the heart beating in the voice. Just about reconciled to a lost friendship, I was home one afternoon and noticed somebody outside my window. There on her hands and knees was Nancy, planting a small forsythia bush in my yard. She neither looked up nor hailed me, too intent on scrapping up the hard clay to house the meager bush. As soon as she was finished, she simply went home.

Never in my life have I received such a gift. A woman who lived on a stingy disability check, who did not own the crumbling cottage she rented for over thirty years, whose health dictated she stay indoors, gave me the only present she could. I knew it was an act of sheer generosity. But it was more than that. A conciliation of sorts, because she missed me, too, wanted me to take root with her, there in that soil. What I had not understood about mountain folk was clarified in that single act of planting. The forsythia would take years to reach its glorious maturity, but it would be worth it, each and every step of the way. ❖

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'SANG SEASON:
DIGGING SPIRIT-FRISKING GINSENG

By MICHAEL JOSLIN

Heavy dew wetting the bottoms of his overalls, an old man carefully picks his way over the uneven ground under the forest canopy on Labor Day. His hazel eyes peer through thick glasses as he scans the shaded green foliage on the forest floor. A glint of red catches his attention. Bending down he parts the symmetrical leaves to find a stalk with a head of berries, some red, some green, some turning from green to red.

Carefully he releases the leaves and moves further into the forest, keeping his eyes sharp for red berries. Joe Willis has waited for months for this day, the opening of ginseng season in the North Carolina mountains.

"I've planned all summer to go out this year," he says, pausing to rest on the steep slope.

Ginseng hunting is a ritual with roots extending into the unimaginable past, over 10,000 years ago. Some scholars believe the early immigrants to North America brought with them across the frozen Bering Straits knowledge of ginseng from their Asian homeland.

Whatever the source of their tradition, Native Americans used ginseng extensively as a medicinal herb. The Cherokee referred to ginseng as "little man" and used it to alleviate stomach ailments, convulsions, and headaches. Other tribes found it valuable in aiding chest congestion, fighting exhaustion, and giving strength to the wounded.

Ninety-three-year-old Joe Willis still enjoys the ritual he began early in the last century. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

Early white settlers learned about the plant from the natives, but it wasn't until a French Jesuit priest explored its value that ginseng became an article of trade. In the 1700s in Manchuria, China, Father Petrus Jartoux learned about ginseng and its value to the Chinese. He wrote his colleague, Father Lafitau, who was working among the Native Americans in Canada.

Father Jartoux' descriptions of the wonders of the plant captured Father Lafitau's imagination. He began to search for the plant in Canada, which had a climate similar to Manchuria's. He searched the area around Quebec, where he was a missionary, and recruited the local Iroquois to assist in his quest.

He found ginseng, and in 1718 published his "Memoire" to the Duke of Orleans concerning the plant. He illustrated his book with pictures of the entire plant—root, leaves, and seeds. In the narrative he describes how ginseng cured an Iroquois woman with a "high and persistent" fever. He also learned that the tribe used the herb in the same way that the Chinese did.

The priest's discovery began highly profitable trade with the Chinese, a trade that spread from Canada down the eastern part of the continent and continues today.

Virginia plantation owner Colonel William Byrd of Westover praised ginseng in his 1728 *History of the Dividing Line*: "Its virtues are, that it gives an uncommon warmth to the Blood, and frisks the spirits beyond any other Cordial. It cheers the heart even of a Man that has a bad Wife, and makes him look down with Composure on the crosses of the world. . . . In one word, it will make a man live a great while, and very well while he does live."

Legend reports that during the dark days of the American Revolution, George Washington wrote to Daniel Boone, "The war effort needs money, bring ginseng." After winning the war and resigning his commission, he returned to his estates, and in September 1784 toured his western lands. On September 12 he wrote in his journal, "In passing over the Mountains I met numbers of Persons & Pack horses going in with Ginsang; & for salt and other articles at the Markets below."

Boone devoted much effort to collecting and selling ginseng. The famous long hunter mobilized his fellow woodsmen and Native Americans to harvest roots throughout the mountains. In 1788 he attempted to ship 15 tons of ginseng down the Ohio River, but the barge struck an island and sank, ruining the massive store of roots.

Undeterred, he returned to the woods he loved, to dig the valuable herb. In the end, he probably made far more money selling ginseng than trading animal furs and hides. Many mountain men and women have followed the paths blazed by Boone and later by David Crockett in scouring the woods for "green gold."

In the 1790s Andre Michaux showed those living around Grandfather Mountain how to prepare the root for the Chinese market, instituting a profitable trade that continues today. For generations folks in the high mountains of Southern Appalachia have traipsed through the forest looking to find ginseng to provide some cash money.

Since boyhood, Joe Willis has found ginseng bounty an important addition to his income. At ninety-three years of age, Joe doesn't move as fast he once did; he can't cover miles of ground in his ginseng ramblings. Nonetheless, he enjoys enacting the ritual he began early in the last century.

"I've done hunted ginseng ever since as a teenager my dad said, 'Let's go ginseng hunting!' We come over above where the Ragan Center is now. Then it was just woods and hunting trails," says Joe, thinking back to around 1930.

His father showed Joe where to look and said, "You start looking right here." The boy found three or four bunches his first time out, and he was hooked on ginseng hunting.

"It was worth three to four dollars a pound—big money then. You could sell it green for sixteen cents an ounce to J. D. Lyons. He just stayed in the Spruce Pine Feed Store for shelter; he didn't work for them. He'd buy ginseng and chickens," says Joe, who grins at the memory.

Always eager for a little spending money, young Joe would hurry back from the woods, brush the dirt from the roots, and get over to find Lyons leaning back in his split-bottom chair.

"I'd hunt every time I had a chance. When I got about grown, there was two days in the year I didn't have anything to do, and I'd take those two days and go hunt ginseng. The Fourth of July and Labor Day I rambled in these old mountains. A lot of time it grows in the rockiest, roughest ground you can get into," says Joe, remembering a time when he was sprier than now.

When he and his sister Jenny lived together in the house that Joe still calls home, he would earn their property tax money by ginseng hunting. Since those days, he has learned to hunt only during the state-mandated season that begins September 1, and he is careful to dig only those plants with ripe berries. His experiences have made him conservation-minded.

"There's a family from down the hollow who came up and dug every spring on the mountains, just dug it all out. The whole family would come up, about a dozen of them. They just stayed in there until they got everything; it didn't matter how little or how few berries," says Joe, shaking his head in disgust.

This abuse of a valuable part of our natural heritage has created much turmoil in recent years.

In 2005, only days before the annual digging season began, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced that the minimum age of wild-gathered roots for legal export would be extended from five years to ten; further, the agency required that exportable plants be limited to those bearing four leaves rather than the former minimum of three.

"People were really upset about the late notice," said Laura Gadd, botanist and ginseng coordinator for the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services Plant Protection Section. "Many people were really upset by the change in general."

Reacting to the outcry from ginseng diggers, sellers, buyers, and exporters, the USFWS announced a return to the five-year age limit and three-leaf standard for exportable roots for 2006 through 2008.

Each year the federal agency must determine the status of wild ginseng, because the herb is one of the species monitored under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), an international agreement among governments. The purpose of CITES is "to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival," according to its web site. As part of this effort, each year the USFWS issues findings of its monitoring of American ginseng.

To reach the determination in 2006, the agency held four public meetings to hear from interested parties and those involved in the wild ginseng trade, whose immediate financial interest is in maintaining the earlier regulations. As a result of these meetings, the government agency took a u-turn to return to the old standards. The seesaw nature of the USFWS's decisions comes largely from the lack of scientific monitoring of ginseng in the wild.

Neither Tennessee nor North Carolina has a monitoring program to accurately gauge the state of the plant.

"We haven't done any monitoring," said Andrea Bishop, conservation biologist for the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. "Monitoring would depend on funding. We would recommend a monitoring program, but the funding is not there. We would like the USFWS to fund it, but they haven't."

In addition to problems with funding such programs, North Carolina's Laura Gadd said she fears that many private landowners would refuse to allow state or federal biologists on their property. With no effective monitoring programs, both states, as well as the federal government, depend on statistics of the annual harvest, which is shrinking, a fact that worries another Toe River Valley ginseng aficionado. He shares Joe's disgust with greedy diggers but wishes to be anonymous, since the way he has chosen to deal with the depleted ginseng crop is to grow his own

Ginseng unfurls in spring. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.

plants on his property to use for his health.

He, too, began as a teenager over a half century ago.

"I had some uncles who hunted it. We'd hunt it just for the fun of it. There was a lot more hunting than there was finding," he says, then laughs.

He was always conscientious about digging only mature plants bearing ripe berries and planting the berries in the area where he dug a root. The ginseng hunters he knew were similarly concerned about maintaining the wild crop.

"Old-timers seemed to be a lot more respectful of private property and the plant itself. You'd dig the mature roots, scatter the seed, then wait five or six years and go back; the seeds you scattered would have made plants.

"Now, a whole family will spread out, going up the face of a hill, and they dig everything. They'll get it all," he says angrily.

About twenty-five years ago, he started growing ginseng on his own property, not to sell but for the tonic properties of the roots. He digs mature roots as he needs them, dries them, and grinds them into powder that he puts in capsules.

"I can kindly tell when I'm needing it. I take it more in the winter than I do in the summer. The best effect on me is that it increases my tolerance to temperature ranges. I don't get near as cold or hot when I'm taking it," he says, as he picks up some of the ginseng-filled capsules.

His ginseng beds have been raided twice in the past three years. He has lost many plants, as well as his temper.

Every fall he collects the ripe berries and stratifies them. He puts them in the box that has a screen bottom and top to keep the mice out. He alternates layers of sand with layers of berries in the box, then buries it through the winter. The stratified seeds germinate a year earlier than those planted in the forest.

He has raised far more ginseng than he needs, but he continues for the love of the plant and to perpetuate it.

"Somebody once said it's sacred if you can't make it. If you can make it, it ain't. There's a lot of sacred stuff in the woods I can't make," he says, then smiles.

Once again he and Joe Willis agree.

"I don't give a dadgum whether I find any or not. I just like to get out and see the mountain, see a rocky ridge or steep cove, see the world the good Lord made," says Joe. ❖

Michael Joslin lives with his wife, Pam, on a farm in the Buladean community of Mitchell County, North Carolina. Through photography and stories, he celebrates the beauty and values of Appalachian nature and culture. He is a professor at Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, where he teaches literature, writing, and photography.

TREASURER HUNTER FINDS BRITISH COIN DATED 1734

By J. ANN TIPTON

Nearly every weekend, Church Hill, Tennessee, resident David Cavin spends a few hours on the banks of the Holston River.

You won't find a fishing pole and tackle box in his hands. Instead of dipping a line in the cool water, he'd rather roll up his sleeves and dig in the dirt. Armed with only a small shovel, sift screen, and dusting brush, the twenty-five-year-old digs until he finds something—anything to connect him to the past.

Flint arrowheads. Fragments of pottery. Rock corn crushers. Once a tomahawk. He's found them all.

"I quit school in the 10th grade," Cavin said. "But the one subject I always loved was history. Now that I'm working to get my GED, it's reminded me how much I like learning about what happened here hundreds of years ago."

One day in the summer of 2005, Cavin's connection to the past became a little more real. Digging into the riverbank a good two feet, Cavin said he found a mother lode of Native American pottery fragments, some with carvings that look to the amateur archaeologist like the sun, the river, and corn.

Soon he found something even more exciting.

David Cavin. Photo courtesy David Grace, Kingsport Times-News.

"I was using the screen to sift through the dirt and mud when I saw the outline of this coin," Cavin said. "I cleaned it up, and there was the face of what looks like King George looking up at me."

When he inspected more closely, Cavin found the year 1734 imprinted on the opposite side of the bronze-colored coin.

. . . finding something interesting like that is almost a reward in itself. It keeps me digging."

Perhaps the strangest part of Cavin's find is that no permanent European colonies existed in Northeast Tennessee until the late 1760s, according to East Tennessee State University history chair Dr. Colin Baxter.

"The year 1734 is even pre-Daniel Boone and the other founders of East Tennessee," Baxter said. "I don't know of any other explorers that could've been here at that time."

The coin, he said, may have traveled via waterway to Tennessee from Virginia where British colonies were established as early as 1607. The other perhaps more plausible answer for how it got here is through trade between the Cherokee people and Europeans.

Cavin said he's given the coin to his two-year-old nephew. Although the toddler likes to hold it—he calls it his penny—Cavin said it'll be out of reach in a safe-deposit box at the bank. He can't even begin to guess how much the coin is worth.

"I'd like to know how much it's worth someday," he said. "But finding something interesting like that is almost a reward in itself. It keeps me digging." ❖

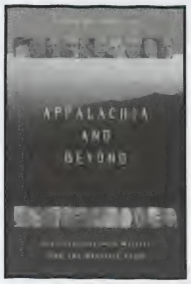
Reprinted with permission from the August 28, 2005, *Kingsport Times-News*, Kingsport, Tennessee.

First Dig

By SANDI KEATON-WILSON

The berries are red (no, not the holly),
'sang, Granny calls it, shouts out its whereabouts.
September, one sleepy afternoon after school,
I scouted the hills with her, running ahead,
my young eyes oblivious to scattering snakes,
zoning in on those bright little beacons.
She catches up with me, slips the Case knife
from her apron, cuts a circle around the roots,
more careful than when digging a grave
for her barn cat. Let me, I say, I want to dig
plumb through to China. *Not trying to get there*
myself, she laughed, *Just looking to send*
these precious roots they use for doctoring.
Does it really help? I ask. People say
she's always doing good. *Yes, child,*
it fills a hole that living's done
dug out of my pocket.

Sandi Keaton-Wilson's work has appeared in *Writer's Journal, Cappers, Ideals,* and *Reminisce,* as well as *Telling Stories: Fiction by Kentucky Feminists, Journal of Kentucky Studies,* and *Kudzu.* She lives in Somerset, Kentucky.



Appalachia and Beyond: Conversations With Writers From the Mountain South
Edited by John Lang
University of Tennessee Press
Knoxville, Tennessee, 2006
$24.95 (paperback), 362 pages

Emory & Henry English professor John Lang has produced an historically valuable and highly readable reference for readers and writers alike in reprinting in a single volume twenty-one interviews conducted with Southern Appalachian writers honored at the college's annual literary festival.

The interviews in Lang's book were first published in *Iron Mountain Review.* In selecting interviews for inclusion in *Appalachia and Beyond*, he wisely chose to present the conversations chronologically according to interview date, an arrangement that coincides with the interviewees' ages and that permits readers to note who influenced whom among Southern Appalachian writers in the latter half of the twentieth century. Another of the book's attributes is that each conversation takes place between two notable fiction writers or poets—Jim Wayne Miller, for example, converses with James Still, and Richard Marius interviews Wilma Dykeman.

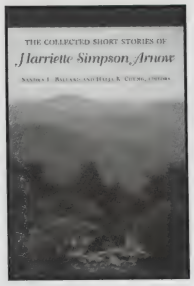
As Lang points out, although the writers whose interviews appear in *Appalachia and Beyond* "are rooted in region," they "are anything but provincial." Among them are Bollingen Prize winner Fred Chappell and Pulitzer Prize recipient Charles Wright. The interviewees represent geographic diversity, hailing from "every part of southern Appalachia except north Georgia." Lang notes, "Whatever their current location, all have literary imaginations that bear the impress of their years in Appalachia."

The conversations cover biographical as well as literary territory and are as candid and intimate as they are intellectually stimulating. One of the younger writers in Lang's collection, South Carolina poet and fiction writer Ron Rash, comments, "One of the things I believe . . . is that the best writing ever done in the Appalachian region is being done right now . . . [because this] is the first generation when you have lots of authors with both the time and the opportunity to write . . . . If you're working in a tobacco field twelve hours a day, you know that, despite what the Romantics might say about living close to the soil, you're too damned tired at night to write your opus."

Rash adds that he thinks "the reason the Appalachian renaissance is happening now, instead of at the time of the broader renaissance of Faulkner and Porter, is that it took a little longer for these opportunities—the education, the leisure, the chance to write—to reach most mountain folk . . . . But I also think that gratitude for these opportunities produces in Appalachian writing a real reverence for family and ancestors because there is recognition . . . that it has been other people, your parents and grandparents, who made it possible for you to do more than they could."

The cogent conversations in *Appalachia and Beyond* preserve valuable comments of writers who have died and capture the strong opinions of writers whose work is still shaping the Southern Appalachian literary scene. As Lang states, "The value of preserving and disseminating such material should be self-evident . . . for these interviews offer a rich store of biographical information about these authors, their formative experiences, their principal literary influences, their major themes and literary techniques, their sense of regional identity, and many other topics." ❖

L. Elisabeth Beattie, a Louisville writer and reviewer, is the editor of *Conversations With Kentucky Writers* and *Conversations With Kentucky Writers II.*



The Collected Short Stories of Harriette Simpson Arnow
Edited by Sandra L. Ballard and Haeja K. Chung
Michigan State University Press
East Lansing, Michigan, 2005
$24.95 (paperback), 260 pages

Finally, two of Harriette Simpson Arnow's best and most ardent critics, Sandra L. Ballard and Haeja K. Chung, have gathered her published and unpublished stories into one volume. They have done a great service to scholars of Arnow's work and of American literature. The headnotes and footnotes provide much information on Arnow's writing of the stories and help place them in context.

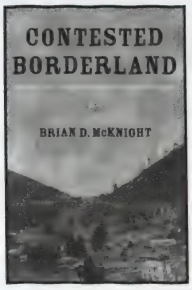
It is a joy to read these stories and to catch glimpses of the major themes and characters in Arnow's longer and more mature fiction. One can glimpse the character of Gertie Nevels, for example, in the story "The First Ride," where the main character, unnamed, flies like the wind on the steed Rebel to save the life of a child and who thinks about the sinfulness of singing and dancing. Similarly, in the story "Blessed—Blessed," traces of Gertie appear when young Katy thinks to herself about dancing with Fiddlin' Turpin's black children: "Maybe it was better to have danced so, than to come face to face with God. She was like her mother's people, old Mrs. Turpin said, a hillbilly with loose wild ways. She shuddered with wickedness as she remembered that she had decided she didn't want to see God, not her grandmother's God."

In "Almost Two Thousand Years," Arnow is concerned with the nature of Christians as the young boy Lupe works for a fruit and vegetable seller (like Joe in *The Dollmaker*) and ponders the merchandising of Christmas. At least two of Arnow's stories, "King Devil's Bargain" and "The Hunter," were forerunners of her second novel *Hunter's Horn*. Many of these stories are also thinly autobiographical (such as "Sugar Tree Holler" and "Fra Lippi and Me") and will provide readers with some perspectives on Arnow's own life.

The best thing about this collection of short stories, however, is not that they may help the scholar better understand Arnow's longer fiction, but that they are good stories in and of themselves. Arnow is a perceptive and skillful writer even in these mostly earlier works, but since many of them have been unpublished until now, their quality might be called into question. Even though most of them were written in the 1930s (a few in the 1940s and '50s), they are contemporary in many ways, dealing with issues that we are (or should be) faced with today—questions of individual responsibility against what we think is wrong.

In these short stories, Arnow often tackles social ills (and implicitly advocates social activism) which are as relevant now as they were when she wrote them. Throughout these stories, the reader can discern Arnow's attitudes toward subjects such as class, race, religion, and personal responsibility. Her vision of humanity at its best and worst is vividly revealed in this excellent collection of stories. What a great pleasure it is to have them in one beautifully edited volume. ❖

Danny Miller is chair of the Literature and Language Department at Northern Kentucky University. He is a contributor to the collection *Harriette Simpson Arnow: Critical Essays on Her Work* and (with Sharon Hatfield and Gurney Norman) is a co-editor of *An American Vein: Critical Readings in Appalachian Literature.*



Contested Borderland: The Civil War in Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia
By Brian D. McKnight
University of Kentucky Press
Lexington, Kentucky, 2006
$40.00 (hardcover), 328 pages

Historian Brian McKnight opens the door to an entirely new realm of Civil War history. Although the importance of Appalachian Kentucky and Virginia to either side has never been a debatable issue, few historians have attempted serious study of these regions during America's dark and tragic conflict. McKnight discusses the regions' similarities, both cultural and geographical, and demonstrates their connection and the role they played in the eventual outcome of the war.

McKnight invites readers to encounter real players, their families, and the events that shaped the rest of their lives. The twenty-five-page bibliography, most of which consists of primary sources, illustrates how McKnight accomplished such a personal portrayal. Readers can get close and personal because of his accurate depiction of Appalachian cultural values demonstrated by the native participants' actions as well as through the observations recorded by outside observers. In illustrating how mountaineers generally put generosity ahead of adversity, for instance, McKnight writes: "Although many people, especially those who lived along the main roads, wished to avoid the soldiers, some remained loyal and free with their food and fires."

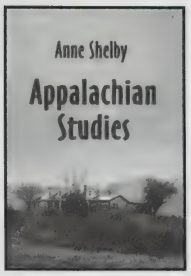
McKnight also displays understanding and comprehension of military strategy and what the leaders of both sides were trying to accomplish in the rough terrain of the Appalachians. He reminds readers that an occupying army needs roads and food, neither of which could easily be found in the borderland regions. Under such conditions, commonly accepted military strategy often disappeared. Such was the case with whichever side was occupying Cumberland Gap. While common sense would dictate that an army in possession of such a strategic location would have a tremendous advantage over the opposing side, reality would tell a different tale. McKnight discovers that prolonged Union occupation of the Gap was especially difficult because it required constant re-supply down the Wilderness Road from distant supply depots. However, retreating from the Gap also had its hazards since there was only one good road and only one crossing over the Cumberland River near present-day Pineville, Kentucky. McKnight also demonstrates the difficulties of moving any army of any size through the borderland regions, yet such movement was thought necessary for ultimate success.

Finally, the author introduces the complex world of politics in the Appalachian region. While it is commonly thought that most of the people in the Appalachian region of Kentucky remained loyal to the Union, it was not always so. McKnight quotes Augustus Ayling of the Twenty-Ninth Massachusetts Volunteers: "The people of the country through which we are to travel are partly Union and partly 'Secesh,' some of the latter being 'bushwhackers' who will take a shot at a Union soldier whenever they get a safe chance."

Often it seems the Civil War enters the misty realm of myth. Many glamorize or concentrate on "fighting for a glorious cause." But *Contested Borderland* reminds us of the war's awfulness, its ugliness and its indiscriminate wrath on common people far removed from the issues that caused the cannons to roar in the first place.

Brian McKnight's valuable research and scholarship can further the serious study and understanding of the people and a particular region of Appalachia during a time of terrible American conflict. ❖

Michael R. Rogers is a retired Pulaski County High School (Kentucky) history teacher and is a current member of the Mill Springs Battlefield Association board of directors.



Appalachian Studies
By Anne Shelby
Wind Publications
Nicholasville, Kentucky, 2006
$15.00 (paperback), 100 pages

One of the first tasks of a poet is to listen to people. Eastern Kentuckian Anne Shelby, author of *Appalachian Studies*, is one of the best listeners in American poetry today. The title poem of this book illustrates her strength perfectly, contrasting official "bureaucratese" with living speech. Responding to an oil spill on Teges Creek, the setting for many of Shelby's poems, some unidentified government agency proposes "a large-scale multi-faceted / data-intensive resource-exhaustive / longitudinal interdisciplinary assessment" to discover the causes "that in conjunction tended to contribute / to a deviant oil to water ratio."

In contrast, a native of the area along the creek responds to the proposal this way:

Well what it was
they was drilling up at Virgil's
and the well blew up.
And the creek turned yaller.
And a big lot of oil men swarmed in here
and give out a lot of red caps that said
SOMETHING OR OTHER PETROLEUM.
And if you can find one minner
in that creek, I will eat it.

In any attempt to represent regional speech on paper, a little is a lot, and more than a little is embarrassing parody. Shelby gets it right, with an ear for the telling detail of phrase that unmistakably locates the speakers of her poems in Central Appalachia, without once overdoing it.

The power of language to preserve and clarify—in storytelling, in song, in old love letters, in poems, and in the lives of the marginalized and disenfranchised—is a theme that runs like a strong spine throughout this book.

One poem, "Spell Check," recounts the difficulties that arise when the poet tries to use a modern word-processing application for writing "hillbilly poems." "Spell Check" is a funny poem, likely to bring a wry smile to anyone who has experienced a similar collision of traditional speech with technology. It also becomes a serious poem, as the best funny poems do, when the examples take on a deeper resonance.

One spell
transformed my taters to tatters,
served
me subpoenas when I ordered soup-beans.
Now it wants to replace the home-place
with just someplace. Is this the same spell
that changed proud to poor, turned minnows
into memories?

Is there a better description of the incursions of "modern life" into rural communities across the country than "replac[ing] the homeplace / with just someplace," all the while staying faithful to the real changes suggested by spelling software?

Shelby demonstrates an enviable ability to inhabit varying poetic forms. Along with the cadenced free verse of most of these poems, she also writes sonnets, a sestina, a pantoum, and traditional ballad measure.

Appalachian Studies is a book in love with the real words of real people, and in love with discovering ways of arranging words into poems that both preserve and survive the moments and specific locales that urged them into being. Readers owe gratitude to Anne Shelby, a debt that should be repaid by giving these poems the attention they deserve. ❖

James Owens lives in La Porte, Indiana, with his wife and three children. His poems and book reviews have recently appeared in *Birmingham Poetry Review, Pebble Lake Review,* and *The Pedestal Magazine,* among others.

Get On Board! Underground Railroad and Civil Rights Freedom Songs, Volume 2.

(Appleseed Recordings)
Kim & Reggie Harris

Back in 1982, folksinging couple Kim and Reggie Harris began performing songs and stories of the Underground Railroad at Philadelphia school assemblies. This led them to explore the rich folklore of African Americans' struggle for freedom. Their 1984 release, *Music and the Underground Railroad* (currently out of print), grew from their studies, as did their 1997 release, *Steal Away: Songs of the Underground Railroad*. The new release, *Get On Board*, explores some of the lesser-known Underground Railroad songs as well as songs associated with the civil rights movement. Of course, many songs from the days of slavery were preserved and updated in the civil rights music, such as "Oh Mary, Don't You Weep" (recently covered by Bruce Springsteen on The Seeger Sessions), featuring an a cappella treatment by guest Bernice Johnson Reagan. The Harrises are joined by other guests, including Guy Davis, Rev. Robert B. Jones, and two members of the SNCC Freedom Singers of the 1960s, Matt and Marshall Jones. Actor Danny Glover reads the work of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, and fourteen-year-old rapper Jonathan "Baby Jay" Guitierrez trades verses with Reggie on "Row de Boat." Kim Harris is proud of their effort to keep these songs alive. "When the time comes for political action," she says, "the younger generation will take these same songs and once again mobilize and remake the tradition to apply to their own causes for freedom and social action." ❖

Ricky Skaggs & Bruce Hornsby

(Legacy)
Ricky Skaggs & Bruce Hornsby

The pairing of two very different but extremely talented Grammy-award winners like Ricky Skaggs and Bruce Hornsby offers many opportunities for musical cross-pollination, and these artists take full advantage of them. Backed by Skaggs' band Kentucky Thunder, Hornsby and Skaggs produce a disc rich in the traditional sounds of the Appalachian mountains, augmented by Hornsby's piano and songwriting. The disc opens with "The Dreaded Spoon," a tale of a youthful ice-cream heist. Another Hornsby composition, "A Night on the Town," contrasts its cautionary tale with a joyful chorus. Skaggs contributes an energetic instrumental, "Stubbs," and the group also covers two traditional arrangements of "Across the Rocky Mountain" and "Hills of Mexico." The two most familiar songs on the disc receive surprising treatments: Hornsby's "Mandolin Rain" is transformed into a minor-key acoustic ballad, while "Super Freak" (yes, the Rick James song) becomes a rollicking bluegrass workout and has been featured on Country Music Television. Skaggs and Hornsby are both attracting new fans for this unique and innovative collaboration. ❖

Slidin' Home

(Rebel)
John Starling and Carolina Star

John Starling, a former surgeon with the U. S. Army and member of the Seldom Scene, put together an all-star band for this release, including Mike Auldridge on resophonic guitar, Tom Gray on bass, Rickie Simpkins on fiddle, and Jimmy Gaudreau on mandolin. As if that weren't sufficient musical talent, Starling also brings in guests such as Emmylou Harris, Jon Randall, Larry Stephenson, Pete Wasner, Kent Ippolito, and Jay Starling. The disc kicks off with the Jimmie Rodgers standard "Waitin' for a Train," followed by a composition from the Tri-Cities' own Roger Rasnake, "Cold Hard Business." Emmylou Harris takes vocals on a song she co-wrote with the late Gram Parsons, "In My Hour of Darkness," and the band also covers Ricky Skaggs' "Irish Spring," Gillian Welch's "The Riverboat Song," and the Lowell George/Little Feat classic "Willin'." Collaborations among artists of this caliber sometimes get bogged down with the excess of talent, but these veterans let the songs take center stage. ❖

Trouble In Mind
(Mercy Recordings)
Get Up Johns

On this collection, singers Jake Hyer, on fiddle and mandolin, and Josh Wenck, on guitar, seem to channel classic country brother acts like the Louvins, Delmores, and even the Everlys. Hailing from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul, the Get Up Johns demonstrate not only a deep love and feeling for the oldtime country sounds but also a desire to add their own stamp to that sound. Whether covering Kitty Wells' "You're not so Easy to Forget" or Leadbelly's "Midnight Special," or performing their own original "Guns to Carry," the Get Up Johns sound as if they could have been recorded yesterday—or four decades ago. Aside from their instrumental prowess, their primary asset is their beautiful, seamless harmony. The production is simple and clean, much like their minimalist, one-microphone stage presentation. ❖

Wayne Winkler is the manager of public radio station WETS-FM in Johnson City, Tennessee, and music editor of *Now & Then*.

Sweet Potato Pie

By MARILYN KALLET

Cobalt blue it landed,
loaded with aspic and whipped cream.
"Blue potatoes," the waiter
explained. We tucked in, sampled
the soft wall: potato mortar,
coconut bricks.

Picture the Aztec farmer
who pulled the first blue potato
like a musical note from the earth. His kids
mocked him—"Dad's a dreamer!
Who's going to swallow this?" His wife,
a weaver, fell in love
with the blue spud. "Potatoes
bore me," she said. "At
least this one offers
night sky, filling romance,
flavor for the eye."

"At least this one
makes me laugh
a little when I
crave more than
mashed potato nights,
laugh a little
when I cry."

Marilyn Kallet is the author of twelve books, and she is poetry editor for *New Millennium Writings*. For seventeen years she directed the creative writing program at the University of Tennessee where she now holds the Lindsay Young Professorship.

A SMELLY BUSINESS BUT GOOD

By FRED SAUCEMAN

Richard Waldrop, President of the Flag Pond Ruritan Club.
See page 73 for more about the club. Photo courtesy Larry Smith, ETSU Photo Lab.

Mention ramps in Southern Appalachia and the stories pour forth. Valued and reviled, honored and abhorred, this wild mountain leek is both a welcomed sign of spring renewal and a mark of shame.

Patty Grant, a member of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, remembers being sent home from school when the teacher detected the scent of ramps on her breath. Folks say they'll keep away a cold, the flu, and the neighbors.

JoAnn Kalonaheskie, whose late parents were full-blooded Cherokee, used to climb the slopes above Cherokee, North Carolina, to gather *Allium tricoccum*. Her people have picked these first wild greens of spring for generations. Arthritic legs won't allow her to climb the banks like she once did, so she relies on freezer bags of frozen ramps from friends. At the Rainbow and Ramps Festival in Cherokee, they bring about $30 a gallon.

"Back when I was young, we didn't have a freezer," JoAnn recalls. "If you canned ramps, they smelled through the jar. You wouldn't believe this, but they did. Now, I just wash them and throw them into freezer bags. It's simple."

Despite the putt-putt courses, dish barns, pancake houses, and prefabricated log homes that crowd Highway 19 in Western North Carolina, traditional Cherokee culture does still exist in these mountains. JoAnn and her family thaw those frozen ramps every Thanksgiving and on special occasions. She and her friend, Martha Sherrill, also a Cherokee, parboil ramps and fry them in bacon grease or rendered fatback.

Often they'll add scrambled or boiled eggs.

Martha still makes her own hominy, pouring acid-laden oak or poplar ashes into an enamel pot, mixing in corn, and stirring laboriously until the outer covering of the kernels comes off. JoAnn still makes bean dumplings the way her mother and grandmothers did. She cooks up a mess of soup beans, kneads the beans into a paste with cornmeal, and drops the dumplings into a pot of boiling water, to which she's added some bean soup for color.

Like many Appalachians, white, African American, or Native American, these Cherokee ladies simmer pots of pork-seasoned soup beans at least once a week. Most times, they'll slice up a yellow or white onion to accompany the beans, but in early spring, it's ramps, raw and bold.

While other festivals in Appalachia feature ramps blended with fried potatoes or even green eggs, organizers of the Rainbow and Ramps event, held in late March each year on the Cherokee Indian Fairgrounds, honor the plant in its most natural and unadorned state.

In a gutsy display of gustatory bravery, a few tank-topped Cherokees enter the ramp-eating contest, as spectators back up a few steps. Each contestant is given one-fourth gallon of raw ramps and a plate. The green portion, as well as the more pungent white, must be eaten or disqualification results. The first entrant with an empty plate and an empty mouth wins.

For the paying public, Denny Crowe, from Granny's Kitchen down on Highway 19, fries whole trout and sautés handfuls of uncut ramps in oil, as Cherokee teens compete in a volleyball tournament sponsored by Moody's Funeral Home.

The presence of a hearse is no indication of the risk of overconsumption. These Cherokees tell me there's no physical danger in eating as many ramps as you want.

With ramps becoming a gourmet table item, the push is on to cultivate them commercially.

"You don't smell them on me?" JoAnn asks. "I've had them for supper and breakfast." That in addition to the hefty pile of ramps she eats with fry bread and fish at the festival.

"I think they're important to people around here," she says. "They connect us to the old days."

JoAnn grew up in a family that had little money, so foraging the forest and keeping a garden weren't mere recreational activities. Her parents sent her to a local boarding school for Cherokees. Boarding school, in her childhood, meant poverty, not privilege. Yet she never went to bed hungry.

"If we didn't have anything else around, my mother would make me elephant ears before I went to bed," she remembers. "They were dumplings made with cold water, flour, black pepper, and salt and then boiled. And they were good."

That boarding school is now gone. "They took everything away from us," she laments. "They tore everything down that meant something to us around here, except the memories, and they can never get rid of those."

To Cherokees like JoAnn, the strong and lingering memory of ramps and the whiteness of a rainbow trout bring them back to a past that recreational vehicle fumes and roulette wheels cannot erase.

For early Native Americans, the Vitamin C packed in the leaves and bulbs of ramps provided a much-needed variation in the diet. Modern medical science has given credence to the Cherokee belief in the therapeutic properties of ramps. In addition to being rich in vitamins, ramps contain a fatty acid used in the treatment of hypertension, and they are said to be effective in increasing production of high-density lipoproteins, believed to combat heart disease by reducing blood serum levels of cholesterol.

Cherokee folk wisdom teaches that ramps thin and cleanse the blood. Medical anthropologist Dr. Anthony Cavender writes, in his book *Folk Medicine in Southern Appalachia*, "Maintaining normal blood viscosity was thought to be critically related to good health. Some older Southern Appalachians today link thick blood with a greater susceptibility to stroke and heart attack because they believe it is heavier and more difficult to pump through the body. Accord-

ing to folk theory, thick blood was more viscous due to the accumulation of waste materials the body failed to evacuate. Boils, obesity, sluggishness, and heat intolerance were viewed as symptoms of thick blood. One's blood 'set' (became thicker and flowed less rapidly) in the winter due to a more sedentary lifestyle."

In the winter, ramps were used in decoctions to treat coughs and colds, and in the summer, the juice of the strong, warm-weather bulbs was blended into poultices to relieve the pain and itching of bee stings. All those healthful properties are counterbalanced, though, by what Cherokees describe as the natural affinity between ramps and pork fat. Reuben Teesatuskie, a silversmith, woodcarver, and member of the Eastern Band's Long Hair Clan, says ninety percent of the food he prepares is cooked with grease. "My brother tried frying ramps in butter, but it didn't work."

In Southwest Virginia, the word "ramp" became a term of derision, used in reference to the Melungeons, persons of mixed African, European, Native American, and Mediterranean ancestry, primarily located in Southern Appalachia, particularly Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia.

"*Melungeon* used to be such a dirty word, that I suspect the people in that part of Virginia created a more polite term, even though 'ramps' was still pejorative, reminiscent of this stinking plant," says Wayne Winkler, president of the Melungeon Heritage Association. "To be a Melungeon was, at one time, to be the hillbilly's hillbilly."

Despite its sullied reputation, the ramp stars in white tablecloth restaurants such as Blackberry Farm in the Smoky Mountain community of Walland, Tennessee. Former executive chef John Fleer, a North Carolinian named one of the "Rising Stars of the 21st Century" by the James Beard Foundation, picked them out of a compost pile while he was a student at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York.

"They weren't nearly as powerful as the ones we forage from off the Cherohala Skyway near Tellico Plains, Tennessee," Fleer says. "Blackberry has several sources for ramps. A trout farmer in Robbinsville, North Carolina, forages them, and we had some folks locally who knew our passion for ramps and delivered when they had extra."

Blackberry Farm is consistently ranked as one of the top small hotels in America, and John Fleer's creative use of native mountain foods, in his "Foothills Cuisine," was largely responsible for that notoriety. He delighted in introducing guests to such mountain treasures as sorghum syrup, trout roe, and ramps, which, he says, are "packed with flavor and regional interest."

An advocate of rugged yet refined cooking, Fleer, a Duke University religion graduate, explains, "Many of our guests had never been exposed to this very regional specialty, and they love it. We pickled ramps and used them as a garnish for salads. We froze the lightly blanched bulbs so they could be served out of season. We made a pesto from the tops, and we made a ramp compound butter."

In his Smoky Mountain kitchen, Fleer demonstrates daily his reverence for the bounty of Southern soil and sea, forests and ponds, and a basement-lining larder of jams and jellies. Just as his mountain neighbors do, he adds ramps to scrambled eggs, but he's also been known to serve up his own take on green eggs and ham as an *amuse bouche* (amusement for the mouth), with soft scrambled eggs, ramp pesto, batons of country ham, and fingers of buttered toast.

At the $450 per person black-tie James Beard Foundation Awards Ceremony and Gala Reception at New York's Avery Fisher Hall in May of 2007, the first dish listed on the menu was Puffed Morels with Ramps and Black Pepper. Grant Achatz prepared it. He is the chef at Chicago's Alinea, a *Mobil Travel Guide* five-star restaurant known for its "Progressive American cuisine" and its "hypermodern, emotional approach to dining." Ruth Reichl, editor of *Gourmet*, declared Alinea the "best restaurant in America" in the magazine's twice-per-decade list of America's top fifty.

Ramps. Photo courtesy Larry Smith, ETSU Photo Lab.

With ramps becoming a gourmet table item, the push is on to cultivate them commercially, but like the independent mountain people who have been digging them for so long, the plants don't lend themselves to easy manipulation. This long-lived perennial takes six to seven years to reproduce by seed, so farmers can't simply plow up fields and sow ramps.

Nevertheless, scientists at North Carolina State University are encouraging cultivation of ramps so that native plant populations would be allowed to regenerate and multiply. "Harvesting ramps from easily accessible, concentrated plantings would not only benefit festival participants, chefs, and consumers, but also create a new marketable product for the commercial grower," writes Dr. Jeanine M. Davis, extension horticultural specialist for NCSU's Department of Horticultural Science. "Research is in progress to develop efficient, practical, and sustainable production practices for ramps."

The plant is elevation-sensitive and thrives in cool, shady areas with damp soil and an abundance of decomposed leaf litter or other organic matter. New leaves emerge in March or April, and they then die back as the weather gets warmer. Once the leaves have died back, usually in June, a flower stalk emerges. The flower blooms in early summer, and seeds develop in late summer. These seeds eventually fall to the ground and germinate near the mother plant.

Pickling, as John Fleer practices, is a common method of preservation, but in Graham County, North Carolina, the Smoky Mountain Native Plants Association dries ramps for a product called ramp meal. This combination of ramp and corn originated among bear hunters, who mixed dried ramps and cornmeal to make cornbread in their camps.

"What's more native than corn and more special than ramps?" asks Beverly Whitehead, chairperson of the association's board.

Making ramp cornbread can be traced at least back to 1833 in North Carolina, when the Jenkins family settled near the Little Tennessee River. In the fall of 2000, the SMNPA took up the cause, as a way to help people earn extra money through the growing and selling of native Appalachian plants, to preserve those plants for future generations, and to provide education about native plant species.

Graham is the third poorest county in North Carolina, at the base of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. There are no four-lane highways crossing through the isolated area.

Whitehead says everything but the paper for the bags of ramp meal is local, even the package design. Growers and foragers bring newly harvested ramps to a common kitchen where a staff of seventeen local people wash each individual leaf and bulb, dry and process the ramps, and hand-package every bag of meal. The product is available in differing strengths. The milder version contains only the green part of the plant. "Real rampy" is a spiked up combination of green stalk and white bulb for heartier tastes. The cornmeal itself is always the white variety, milled from locally grown heirloom corn.

Eleven-ounce bags of ramp meal, with a bacon-greased cornbread recipe on the back, have a shelf life of about a year. Whitehead says there are two theories on how to serve rampy cornbread. Some favor immediate eating, while others advocate waiting a day for the flavors to "infuse."

"We eat ramps in my community any way you can imagine," she says. "My father likes fresh ramp leaves torn up in salads."

Bob Whitehead, a brave warrior who flew in the Berlin Airlift, and Beverly's great uncle Robert Slocumb, often bet each other how many ramps they can eat at the kitchen table.

"They'll start at the back of the leaf and eat forward to the bulb," says Beverly. "One of my favorite ways to serve ramps is with fresh, farm-raised spinach and other greens, for the nouveau Appalachian way."

As the Cherokee language literally describes them, ramps are "a smelly business but good." ❖

To order ramp meal, contact the Smoky Mountain Native Plants Association, P.O. Box 761, Robbinsville, NC 28771. Telephone: 828-479-8788.

Fred Sauceman is editor of *Now & Then*. From *CrossRoads: A Southern Culture Annual 2005*, reprinted by permission of Mercer University Press.

THE FIRST FAMILY OF RAMPS

By FRED SAUCEMAN

"This was an exceptional year for ramps," says Coy Harris in the spring of 2006. "It didn't get too cold, and we didn't have any late freezes."

Coy and his brother Charles are hard-working members of the Flag Pond Ruritan Club, and for twenty-two years, these citizens of the south side of Unicoi County, Tennessee, have put on a spring festival, in honor of *Allium tricoccum*, the ramp, the wild mountain leek.

The Harris brothers don't view the fragrant festival as work. Compared to what they've done all their lives, shoveling a few potatoes around an iron skillet's a cinch.

Charles has held down the same job at Erwin's Hoover Ball plant for thirty-seven years. Coy grew burley tobacco for forty-two seasons. He used to drive a wrecker. He once ran a sawmill. Now he farms beef cattle.

Mountain soul infuses Harris family cooking. The late Ola Harris stuck ramps into her jars of home-canned dill pickles. At the festival, Coy and Charles fry strips of bacon to the point of perfect crispness. They say frying it outside, in the mountain air, makes the difference.

The Harris brothers oversee a line of black iron skillets backed up near the brick-walled, now abandoned Flag Pond Elementary School, home of the Wildcats. The last class was held there back in 1991. Coy says it was about that time when four of the top ten graduates at Erwin's Unicoi County High School were Flag Pond alumni.

The $7 feed at the 2006 Flag Pond Ramp Festival was pure Appalachia: creamy soup

Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

beans, a tall square of cornbread, Harris-fried bacon, and cubes of potatoes, stirred around in that bacon grease.

"With or without?" asks one of the volunteers. Then she wonders why anyone would come to a ramp festival and pass on the ramps. The bulbs and leafy green parts are mixed into the fried potatoes, and the plant's pungency is calmed. But not for the competitors in the ramp-eating contest, who consume ramps raw.

Ramp reek didn't keep the office seekers away, though. As one diner several elbows down from us quipped, "There are almost as many politicians here as there are humans."

Cooks from all over Unicoi County entered the ramp recipe contest, and Genevieve Shelton, who lives in Flag Pond, about four miles below the school, took the top prize with "Ramps and Fixins in One Dish."

Genevieve says it's "like a meal in one," and this was the first time she had assembled the dish using ramps. If they aren't available, Genevieve advises using green onions or regular onions. This mountain casserole, served cold, is akin to the cornbread salads on the menus of several Southern Appalachian eateries. ❖

Ramps and Fixins in One Dish

Ingredients

1 package Hidden Valley Ranch dressing mix
1 cup sour cream
1 cup mayonnaise
1 9-inch pan of cornbread, crumbled
2 16-oz. cans pinto beans, drained and rinsed
3 large tomatoes, chopped
½ cup chopped green pepper
½ cup chopped ramps
1 can whole kernel corn, drained
2 cups shredded cheese
1 pound bacon, fried crisp and crumbled

Steps

1. *Mix together the first three ingredients and set aside.*
2. *Place half the cornbread in an oblong dish.*
3. *Top with half the beans.*
4. *Layer on half the tomatoes, half the green pepper, half the ramps, and half the corn.*
5. *Then add half the cheese and half the bacon.*
6. *Repeat layers.*
7. *Refrigerate several hours or overnight.*

A native of Greeneville, Tennessee, Fred Sauceman is the author of *The Place Setting: Timeless Tastes of the Mountain South, from Bright Hope to Frog Level,* a book in two volumes published by Mercer University Press.

The Harris brothers.
Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

GROWING GREASY CUT-SHORTS

By BILL BEST

When I was a child growing up in the mountains of Haywood County, North Carolina, I lived on a small subsistence farm. We grew almost all our own food including corn for corn meal and wheat for flour. We grew hogs for butchering and raised milk cows for their milk. We never ate beef, preferring pork and poultry. The milk cows also provided butter for our own use and to sell. We sold milk until it became against the law to sell "Grade B" milk. Our usual flock of around a hundred laying hens provided for our family, with the remaining eggs being traded at a general store for coffee, sugar, spices, flavorings, and other necessary food items we didn't produce ourselves.

My father, uncles, and older cousins butchered the hogs for several families at one time when the weather turned cold enough during the fall. The meat was then preserved for use during the year. Most of it was cured, and one cured ham could bring as much as a whole hog prior to butchering. We kept the shoulders, and the side meats were cured for breakfast and for seasoning vegetables. My mother also canned some hams for us along with her canned sausage. The tenderloins were cooked fresh and were considered the best eating of all, especially when accompanied by redeye gravy and fresh biscuits.

We grew several gardens. There was cabbage, lettuce, both green and dried onions, turnips, okra, green peas and field peas, many varieties of tomatoes and beans, and white, open-pollinated field corn for eating fresh, for making fried corn, and for hominy. Much of the bean crop was dried into leather britches, also known as shuck beans,

Bill Best. Photo courtesy O'Neil Arnold.

shucky beans, or, at one time, fodder beans. The peas were dried and shelled for storage. The field peas, beans, and tomatoes we grew are all defined as heirlooms now. And shuck beans, once a necessity prior to the advent of canning and refrigeration, are now considered delicacies, reserved for holidays and family reunions. Many beans were shelled out for seed, and those not needed for the following summer or for trading to family and neighbors were used for cooking as dried beans. They were served with cornbread, butter, and onions and, accompanied by milk, became supper on many occasions.

When my wife, Irmgard, and I moved to Kentucky to start working for Berea College in 1962, we bought a farm and began raising our own gardens. Instead of planting handed-down seeds, I started buying seeds from seed catalogs and plants for transplanting from farm stores. But I was in for a rude awakening. I found that the vegetables our gardens produced didn't have the texture or flavors I had grown up with. When I reminisced about the gardens of my earlier years, I thought I was simply being romantic and that the tomatoes and beans I remembered were no different from the ones I was growing in Kentucky. I thought my taste buds were failing me.

My mother had always been a seed collector, and when we would visit my parents each fall, she would insist that I take back some of the bean seeds she had saved from her plantings that summer. Gradually I began to understand why I was having trouble with commercial seeds. I was planting seeds developed by bean breeding programs that wouldn't break during mechanical harvest. To their credit, the seed companies admonished us to "pick the beans while they were young and tender," but that meant picking them before the seed appeared. Otherwise they were too tough to eat. It was no wonder that some companies boasted that their beans were "grass-like."

I also started doing a little research into the reasons our basic foods were "being messed with."

Mother's beans never got tough, even after they had matured and turned yellow on the vine. They had the same tastes and textures I had remembered before I had started growing commercial varieties. I quickly reverted back to growing her beans and realized that my taste buds were still intact. I also started doing a little research into the reasons our basic foods were "being messed with."

My interest in gardening continued, and thirty-six years ago, I started growing vegetables for the farmers' markets in Lexington, Kentucky, and in Berea, just three miles from our farm. Our two sons, David and Michael, and daughter, Barbara, became active gardeners. They soon excelled in marketing as well. And as soon as they were old enough to drive, they often went to the Berea market by themselves.

We grew and sold okra, sweet corn, peppers, eggplant, squash, potatoes, broccoli, hybrid and heirloom tomatoes, and heirloom beans. I quickly gave up growing any commercial beans at all since I feared the tough gene that had been introduced into commercial beans might migrate to my heirloom beans.

At first we had good success at selling tomatoes, both the more flavorful of the hybrid varieties and, increasingly, the heirloom varieties that were unfamiliar to most people at that time. In order to market the heirloom varieties, especially the pinks, blacks, yellows, striped, green-when-ripe, and other "unusual" colors, we had to give samples to customers. Gradually we won over a lot of people, and pink tomatoes are now our best sellers. Customers discovered that tomatoes high in acids and sugars were much more flavorful than the red tomatoes which are mostly high in acids. Red tomatoes are now far down in the list of customer preferences. Chefs at the best restaurants in Lexington have given our heirloom tomatoes a boost by putting our names on their menus. They come to the market to buy our heirloom tomatoes, usually arriving early to get the pick of our offerings and often taking up to forty percent of our load.

Many customers were at first skeptical of our heirloom beans since they looked so different from

the new designer beans, with their designer genes, which had been developed for machine harvest and not for food. However, we soon noticed an interesting phenomenon: Customers were buying our beans to flavor the beans they were buying from other vendors or to flavor and add texture and protein to those they were growing at home. They discovered that when they mixed our beans with the "grass-like" commercial beans, they could get flavor and texture approaching those they had grown up with. Gradually they began buying only our beans, despite the fact that we were charging more for ours than other vendors were charging for the machine-harvested ones.

Our most popular beans are traditional half-runners, cut-shorts, and greasy beans. Most seem to have originated with Indian tribes in this region. I recently attended a lecture by an archaeologist who had photos of 400-year-old bean seeds taken from Indian mounds. They were clearly cut-shorts, beans that are packed so tightly in the pod that the beans square off on the ends. Cut-shorts are especially high in protein because of the volume of beans compared to hull. Another favorite, greasy beans, don't have the fuzz of other beans and are slick in appearance, thus greasy looking. Both types can also share characteristics, and our collection now contains many varieties of greasy cut-shorts.

I started documenting the beans people were sending me. I bought another freezer, since the first one was running over, and started making sure I had saved enough seed beans to share or swap with others. Gradually the process became unmanageable, and I started talking with family and friends about becoming better organized in a project that was coming to resemble a calling. I wrote two articles, one on heirloom beans and one on heirloom tomatoes, for a regional magazine, *Appalachian Heritage*. They were then reprinted in other publications, which led to more requests for information and seeds.

I then teamed with nine other people from three states to form a not-for-profit organization called the Sustainable Mountain Agriculture Center that could be an umbrella organization to host numerous agricultural and cultural activities including seed saving, woodlot utilization in a sustainable fashion, and experimentation with traditional Appalachian medicinal plants such as ginseng. Being not-for-profit also enables us to receive outside funding for hiring interns and conducting programs. Michael was the executive director for the first three years. Since my retirement from Berea College, I have assumed that mantle. Michael is now a professor of agricultural economics at Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville, Tennessee.

Many local and regional groups have been given guided tours of our summer operations, and the center has hosted visitors from Maine to California and from the state of Washington to Florida. Our web site has attracted seed buyers from almost all states and several countries. Some visitors have brought heirloom seeds with them, and a husband and wife from Georgia recently brought both seeds and a seed sheller they use in their operation. I have purchased one, and it works like a charm, speeding my shelling duties ten-fold.

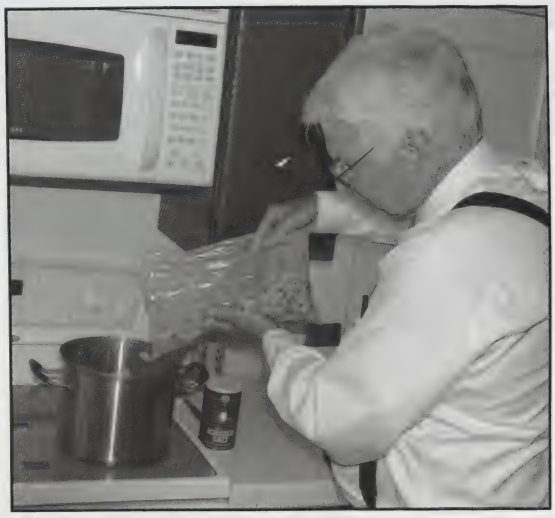
Our current collection of Appalachian heirloom bean varieties now exceeds 300, while we have over fifty Appalachian heirloom tomato varieties. We now own four freezers.

I believe we are helping people of all ages get reacquainted with a part of their food heritage which should not be lost. We are maintaining an important part of the genetic diversity of some of our major food crops. And our many customers think we have reintroduced to the general public some important foods that are both tasty and nutritious. Most of our interns have realized that bigger is not always better when it comes to agricultural matters, and some have even chosen to join us by developing their own operations. One is now a full-time grower of heirloom vegetables. We salute them. ❖

Bill Best is professor emeritus of physical education at Berea College in Kentucky and director of the Sustainable Mountain Agriculture Center.

BOILED PEANUTS AND THE BONDS OF FAMILY

By FRED SAUCEMAN



It was only natural for Paul and Nancy Stanton to settle in the mountains of East Tennessee back in 1985. They had been lured by the highlands practically all their lives.

From what Paul describes as "the flatlands of Atlanta," the couple first felt the call of the Appalachian foothills of north Georgia, and when breaks from his practice as a vascular surgeon in the state's capital city allowed it, they'd head to Lake Lanier, the mountains clearly visible from the waterside.

They felt the tug of towns like Duluth, Dahlonega, Clayton, and Ellijay. It was the mountain air. The scent of pine forests. The clear views on cool days.

But something else kept them coming to the uplands of the Peach State. They had fallen for boiled peanuts, sold on street corners.

"There's hardly any gray area with boiled peanuts," says Paul, president of East Tennessee State University since 1997. "Usually on first tasting, people make up their minds whether they like them or not."

The Stantons' daughter Shelley, now a physical therapist in Suffolk, Virginia, grew up eating boiled peanuts, but her husband Mo Canada, a Tidewater native, remains devoted to the standard salted Virginia variety.

Two of the Stantons' three children became boiled peanut converts early on. Son Ryan, now a medical doctor in Lexington, Kentucky, has the peanut passion, but brother Eric never got past the earthy flavor.

A vascular surgeon, ETSU's president, Dr. Paul E. Stanton, Jr., normally watches his sodium intake, but when it comes to boiled peanuts, generous shakes of salt are prescribed. Photo courtesy Fred Sauceman.

University presidents seek relief and recreation from relentless professional pressures in a number of ways. Some golf. Some sail. Paul cultivates roses in the warm months and boils peanuts for the family in the colder ones.

"It's a fall and winter tradition in our family," he says. "We boil peanuts just about every weekend. By February, we've pretty much had our fill until cool weather arrives again in the fall."

On Saturday mornings, Paul heads to the north Johnson City Kroger to buy the raw peanuts. He notes that not all grocery stores sell them. For peanut boiling, Nancy bought him a special reinforced pot, a tall one with a glass lid. It's a pot manufactured for pasta but one the Stantons devote solely to peanuts. The briny boiling water had leeched out the insides of several weaker vessels.

If you're really serious, Paul adds, invest in an iron kettle and do the boiling outside.

"I fill the pot with water right out of the spigot and really salt it at the beginning. I buy a Morton's salt container and probably use a quarter of it, maybe more, with each preparation.

"You bring the water as immediately as you can to a full boil and let the peanuts boil for two or three minutes, then turn them down to about three-fourths (medium high). Add more salt then. Turn the temperature down to medium about thirty minutes into the process. Leave it at that for three or four hours, then down to low. Add more salt at that point and leave the pot on low, for a total cooking time of twelve to eighteen hours."

Sometimes the boiling can take up to twenty-four hours. Paul's favorite part is the periodic taste-testing.

"I do it hourly until I see that the peanuts are really good and soft and very salty. Which is not good for you," he laughs, as his physician side briefly emerges.

Despite the heavy saline content of the water, Paul says consuming peanuts is healthy, because of the protein concentration in the groundnut and the essential vitamins it contains.

"I can't say I'd recommend boiled peanuts to somebody with hypertension or heart disease because of the salt content," he interjects. "It'll kick into your system, I'm sure. I've never gone to the doctor and had my blood drawn any time right around eating them. I think it would be adverse if you had a daily habit of it. But for a few weekends out of a year, it shouldn't be a problem."

I ask the president what he tells people who contend that boiled peanuts have the flavor of topsoil.

"Some of us like to eat topsoil," he responds.

"How would you describe the taste?" I ask.

"It's like good sea water," he answers. "That taste of the ocean on your tongue. They have a natural type of taste that goes down very well. My grandsons, Matthew especially, could stand and eat them all day."

For the Stanton family, the daylong peanut boil is a way of extending time together on shared weekends that are coming farther apart now, with marriages, doctoral degrees, and the demands of new jobs. When Paul Stanton says, "I prefer to make it a lengthy process," he's speaking of peanut boiling on one level, but in another, deeper sense, it's clear that what he really wishes to prolong is the bond of family. ❖

Fred Sauceman is editor of *Now & Then*.

Global Economy

By GEORGE ELLA LYON

They are at their sweatshop
in a remote area of Jordan
while I am at my desk
wearing cheap jeans from Target.

I am at my desk
wearing cheap jeans from Target
because they are at their sweatshop
in a remote area of Jordan.

The dragline driver gouges
coal from the blasted mountain
while I am cool and clean
in my little upstairs office.

I am cool and clean
in my little upstairs office
because the dragline driver gouges
coal from the blasted mountain.

Hot water
Cool air
Cheap clothes

Hot water
Cool air
Cheap clothes

Two dozen workers struggle
in a tiny space for sleeping
while I luxuriate
in a huge smooth bed

which I can afford
because of cheap jeans from Target
and cheap coal from Hazard
and other peoples' suffering

where I rest easy
while the mountain is dying
and the workers cough the dust
of my plenty from their lungs.

The author of thirty-five books for children and adults, George Ella Lyon, Harlan County, Kentucky native, works as a freelance writer and teacher in Lexington. Her most recent books are *No Dessert Forever!* and a reprint of *With a Hammer for My Heart.*

NOW & THEN

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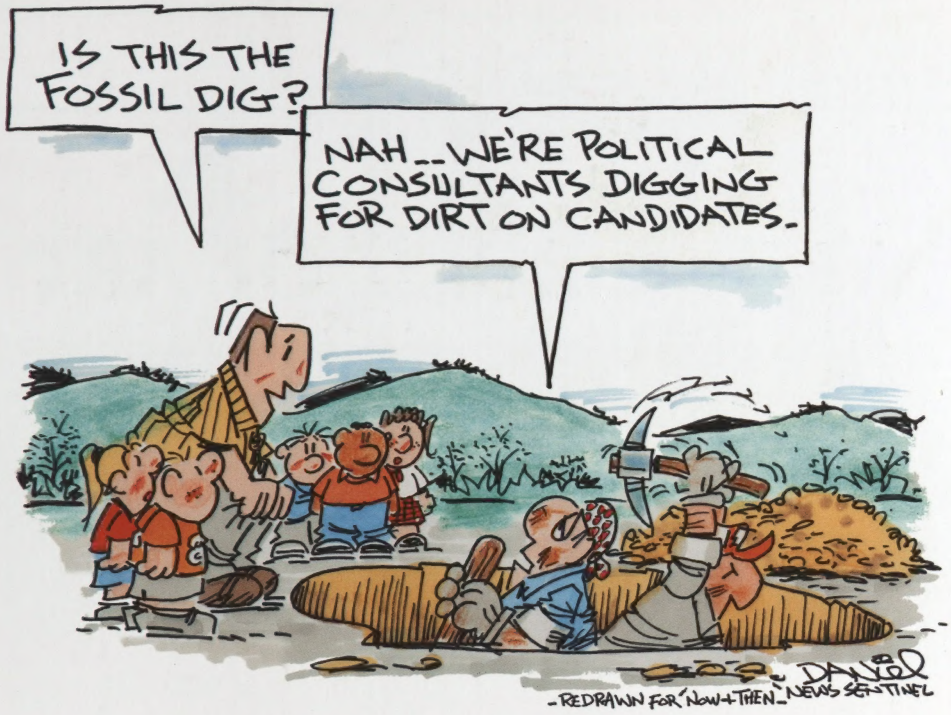
Thank you!

AT THE ROOT OF ART

As we put together each issue of *Now & Then*, we are constantly delighted by something we read or see. Take, for example, the Michael Joslin photograph shown above. Michael wrote the ginseng article on page 57. At first glance we wondered why, amidst the ginseng photographs he sent, an abstract painting was included. Closer observation, of course, revealed it to be artfully arranged ginseng on a blue towel. The more we looked at the photograph, the more we wanted to share it with you, our readers. After all, you are an integral part of this magazine, and we want you to be as constantly delighted as we are.

Ginseng roots laid out to dry. Photo courtesy Michael Joslin.



Charles Daniel redrew this cartoon specifically for this issue of *Now & Then*. We appreciate his talent and the many kindnesses he has shown this magazine.

Cartoon courtesy Charles Daniel, Knoxville News-Sentinel.

NOW & THEN

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